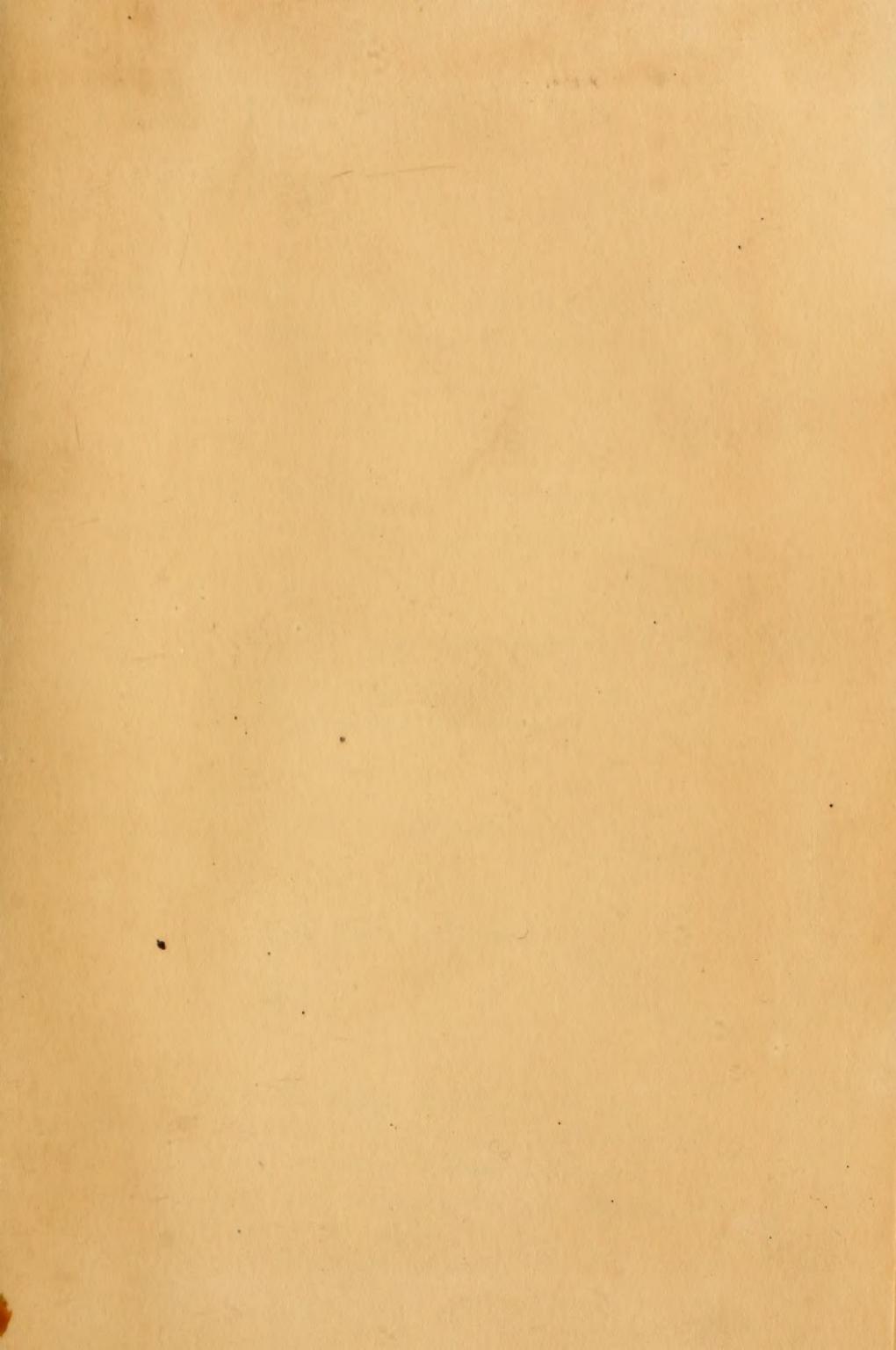


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THE DEGREES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

A METHOD OF DIRECTING SOULS ACCORDING TO
THEIR PROGRESS IN VIRTUE

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

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Permissu Superiorum

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THE DEGREES OF THE
SPIRITUAL LIFE

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Nihil Obstat.

DOM PETRUS NUGENT, O.S.B.,

Censor Deputatus.

Imprimi Potest.

✠ GULIELMUS,

Episcopus Arindelensis,

Vicarius Generalis.

WESTMONASTERII,

die 28 Junii, 1907.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE work which I have here the privilege of introducing to English readers is already well known and highly valued in France and other countries. I have undertaken this translation at the wish of my Abbot, and with the permission of the author, in the confident expectation that a book so clear and admirable will be as much appreciated by English-speaking Catholics as it has been by their brethren on the Continent. For this book is well fitted to become the spiritual companion of souls who are entering on the way of perfection, and they will find in it a sure and faithful guide. Though primarily intended for priests and religious, it is by no means adapted for them alone, and there are few indeed who are in earnest about their salvation who will not get help and light from its perusal. I hope that to many it will become what *The Spiritual Combat* was to St. Francis of Sales, and what that great Saint's own *Introduction to the Devout Life* has been to countless souls. For the Abbé Saudreau has no new doctrine of his own to proclaim; his work has been to gather together, expound, and co-ordinate the teachings of the Saints. Though the structure of the book is founded on St. Teresa's *Interior Castle*, and it may in some sense be regarded as a commentary on that immortal work, yet the author has illustrated and enforced the teachings of the

Seraph of Carmel from the writings of innumerable other Saints with such skill that the whole work has become, not a mere mosaic of quotations, but a luminous exposition of the science of perfection.

It is, however, unnecessary for me to commend a work which has already been welcomed so warmly, and which has the special authorization and approval of His Eminence Cardinal Mathieu and other distinguished members of the hierarchy.

I have to thank those who have kindly assisted me in the labour of translation, and especially my friend Mrs. F. Yorke Smith, who, with equal ability and perseverance, has accomplished the larger share of a somewhat arduous task ; Mr. F. Clement Egerton ; and Dom John Chapman, Prior of this Abbey, who has greatly assisted me in the work of revision.

Those readers who find this book of service to them are requested to remember in their charitable prayers those who have been instrumental in its translation, that they, too, may make progress in the way of perfection, and mounting in their turn the degrees of the spiritual life, may finally attain to perfect charity.

D. B. C.

ERDINGTON ABBEY,

Feast of Corpus Christi,
1907.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IT is no novelty to attempt to classify Christian souls according to the degree of perfection to which they have attained. Indeed, so ancient a writer as the author of the works which bear the name of Dionysius the Areopagite had already laid down the principle that we must distinguish three successive phases in the work of the formation of a soul by grace—the states, namely, of purification, illumination, and perfection.

And long before this, in the second century, Clement of Alexandria, describing in his *Stromata* the steps by which the faithful soul mounts towards the *gnosis*, or perfect knowledge, distinguished in like manner three degrees. The first is that in which the soul is dominated by fear, and abstains through fear from all that is unjust ; the second degree is ruled by hope, whereby the soul desires the Sovereign Good ; and the third is charity, which gives the perfection of knowledge (*Stromata*, iv. 7).

St. Basil repeats the same teaching (*Proem. in Reg. fus. tract.*, No. 3).

“ St. Gregory of Nazianzen,” says Fénelon, “ like nearly all the Fathers, has followed the division into slaves, hired servants, and children—the first guided by fear, the second by interest, and the third by love.”

In the Middle Ages the same distinction became classical

amongst theologians. In the terms of the pseudo-Dionysius, they recognized the purgative way, or that of beginners ; the illuminative way, or that of the more advanced ; and the unitive way, that of the perfect ; and the Church has confirmed this teaching in condemning a proposition of Molinos which rejected it. Mystical authors, also, have chosen to divide the just who live on the earth into distinct classes.

St. Catherine of Siena, in her *Dialogue*, points out the stages through which the soul passes on the way of perfection. In this kind of ascension of the soul to God she reckons three degrees, and to these she adds, later on, a fourth or higher degree, which is none other than the union, perfected and consummated, or mystical marriage of the soul with God. St. Francis of Sales, in his *Treatise of the Love of God* (Book X., chap. iv.), divides the servants of God into four classes. Richard of St. Victor distinguishes three degrees of charity. St. Teresa, in her *Interior Castle*, treats this question with greater length and clearness, and her natural genius, her great experience, and the superabundant lights with which God favoured her, have combined to give us a real masterpiece of mystical teaching.

But if there is no novelty in thus classifying the states through which souls pass in their quest after perfection, it is by no means a vain or a superfluous task. Were it so, indeed, the Fathers, theologians, and mystical writers would not have insisted on this point, as they have done. Besides, the description of the successive phases of the ascetical life forms a whole spiritual psychology, the study of which is as instructive as it is interesting. Again, is it not "certain that beginners and perfect souls ought to be

guided according to quite different rules”?¹ In order to direct souls wisely, it is necessary to bear in mind the degree of perfection which they have acquired.

“The grace of beginners,” remarks Père Grou (*Manuel des Âmes Intérieures*, p. 71), “is not the same as that granted to the more advanced, nor is this the same as that of those who have attained to perfection. Dispositions which are good in a beginner would not be so in one who is more advanced; certain practices which are suitable in one state are no longer so in another.” St. Teresa was near stopping on the way of perfection, because a priest, who was otherwise good and zealous—one Gaspar Daza—wished to push her on too fast; and many others, on the contrary, have remained in a regrettable state of mediocrity who would have been raised very high if the rules which are fitted to generous and more advanced souls had been applied to their case.

How, then, must we make this classification? There is, first of all, the classical distinction of the three ways, which it would be rash to reject. We shall adopt it as our foundation. But this classification is very wide, and spiritual writers have conceived other more detailed distinctions; and for these subdivisions we do not think we can take a better guide than St. Teresa, not only because her authority in spiritual matters is of the first rank, but also because she has treated of this question at length and with great clearness in her *Mansions* or *Interior Castle*. The teachings of other masters of the spiritual life will then often serve to confirm and complete the doctrine of this great Saint.

¹ *Articles d'Issy*, drawn up by Bossuet, Fénelon, and Tronson, No. 34.

Is it necessary to remark that in this kind of moral classification the various degrees are not separated from each other by clear and precise boundaries ? Let us take sinners, for instance. As to these we base our distinctions on the defects of ignorance, weakness, carelessness, and malice ; nevertheless, such defects are found mingled in very different proportions in the various individuals. So it is with ,faithful souls ; very diverse sentiments, some approaching to perfection, and others further removed from it, are found to mingle and overlap in the same soul. We must apply in such cases the saying of theologians, *Judicium fertur ex communiter contingentibus.* The classification must be made after the predominating dispositions, which an attentive observer will easily discover.

Lest we should be accused of rashness, we should, however, perhaps do well to explain how we have been led to deal with so difficult a subject.

We were far from intending, when we took this work in hand, to develop it so fully. We had been asked to write a mere magazine article on a subject which seemed to deserve elucidation, and we should never have thought of pushing our investigations further had it not been for the encouragement which we received on the completion of this initial task—encouragement which came from very competent judges, and which stimulated our ardour to proceed. It did not seem impossible to complete the work ; the notes which we had made for our own guidance in the direction of souls were available, and little by little these notes developed into a book. Every one who has undertaken the serious study of any subject well knows what is wont to happen. At first the way seems short and easy, but as we advance new horizons open out before us, and the

road grows ever longer. So it has been with this work. What reception awaits it? God alone knows.¹ If the enterprise is thought to be too high a one, and the author inadequate to his task, let him be pardoned at least for the sake of his good intentions. Certain observations appeared to us to be true and useful, and we have accordingly made them. We are conscious that we have but acted as an echo to the voices of the great masters, and if any good should result from our labours, it is to them that it will be due.

If this work should but serve to call attention to certain passages of their writings, and thus inspire our readers with the desire to know them better, we should consider that we had neither wasted our own time nor that of our readers.

¹ When these lines appeared some years ago we were far from expecting so great a circulation. The two French editions, now exhausted, consisted of 4,000 copies. Translations in several foreign languages have appeared. God has visibly blessed our work. May He deign to bless it yet, and make it serve for the instruction and edification of Christian souls!—*Note to the third edition, 1905.*)

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THE DEGREES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

CHAPTER I

SINNERS

§ 1. *Obduracy.*

1. BEFORE beginning our study of the steps or degrees of the spiritual life by which the soul mounts up to God, let us attempt shortly to describe the degrees of sin. As the soul which is faithful to grace scales height after height, up to the very summit of perfection, so, on the other hand, the rebellious soul may descend from precipice to precipice until it is plunged in the unfathomable depths of the abyss.

We are not at present considering the case of those who fall accidentally into grave sins and at once rise up again, but rather that of those who remain in a state of sin and have not the courage to emerge from it.

2. With some, faith remains intact, and they are far from wishing to shake off its yoke. This may spring from a special grace of God or from natural attachment to their religion, or, again, from the salutary influence of a Christian environment. In any case, their faith has been preserved from danger ; they do not know what doubt is, and for them truth has lost nothing of its weight.

In this first case, remorse is active ; the sinner would fain abandon his sin, but he has not the courage to do so ;

he groans under the tyranny of his passions, and yet remains their slave. Perhaps it is the difficulty of confessing his guilt which keeps him away from the Sacraments, or even involves him in continual sacrileges ; still, his torments are great, and great is the longing which he feels to leave the state of sin. Often, indeed, he resolves to do so, and yet each time he shrinks back at the last moment, and puts it off till later. This state is not yet one of obduracy or obstinate attachment to sin ; and, as a matter of fact, those who have preserved their faith alive are, of all sinful souls, the most easy to convert, more especially if they have kept up some habit of prayer.

3. But it is rare that the soul remains in this condition. As the result of resistance to good and of continual unfaithfulness, grace becomes less abundant and less efficacious ; the voice of God, continually rejected, becomes less urgent ; remorse tends to lessen ; the light of faith, if not extinguished, becomes obscured ; the passions, constantly indulged, become ever more exacting and tyrannical, and then the sinner falls into the state of obduracy.

This state is deplorable ; it is very offensive to God, and dangerous for the soul, which appears insensible to the strongest appeals of reason, and is not disturbed by the most weighty considerations ; everything flows over it, like water over marble, without penetrating or softening its hardness. This is because the evil does not lie in the judgment, but in the will ; it is the will which is rebellious and obstinately stiff—the will which rejects in advance all the arguments brought to bear on it, without deigning even to consider them.

§ 2. *Causes of Obduracy.*

4. We said that obduracy comes from resistance to grace, and this resistance produces results the more pernicious in proportion to its guilt. Thus, it is less dangerous if it proceeds from *ignorance*, as is the case with many souls

that have had little instruction, whose intelligence is but poorly developed, or whose Christian education has been greatly neglected. In the same category may be placed certain characters of a giddy and heedless type, hardly capable of reflecting seriously on the gravity of their faults. As such souls have received less from God, and are called by Him to a lesser degree of perfection, they are more excusable, and in their case the Judge will be less severe.

5. But if the soul is unfaithful to the voice of conscience through *cowardice*—from the fear, for instance, of having to do violence to its inclinations—or through weariness or discouragement, the effects of this infidelity will be much more fatal.

6. They will be far worse still if the resistance to grace amounts to *malice*, the sinner deliberately, out of mere wantonness, preferring the evil propensities inspired by the devil to the good desires which come from God.¹

Although less common, sins of malice are yet all too frequently met with. Some Christians get angry when they see their undertakings failing, misfortunes overwhelming them, or death snatching from them those whom they love, and they lay the blame on Divine Providence. “What have I done to God,” say these poor creatures in their madness, “that He should treat me so hardly?” And then, as a kind of revenge, they neglect their religious duties more and more, and plunge deliberately into sin.

Others are vexed that they cannot indulge their passions in peace; they fall into a kind of rage against themselves and against God. As they cannot get rid of faith, and are keenly susceptible to the sting of conscience, they enter into a struggle with God, and, like Mathan, they would fain

“Drown all their remorse in crime.”

They have not, however, yet reached the extreme pitch of obduracy, for there is in this frenzy a blindness, a sort

¹ Venerable Father Libermann, *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 260.

of dementia, which in some small degree diminishes its guilt.

The malice which is cold and deliberate is a still graver sin, and the obduracy which results is far more terrible. Were not Luther and Calvin more guilty than the unhappy fanatics whom they stirred up ? Was not Voltaire more responsible than Marat ?

§ 3. *Obstacles to the Progress of Evil.*

7. Once started on the way of iniquity, sinners can, and, in fact, do, go to the last extremes of crime, unless they meet with obstacles which stop them, and make them observe some degree of moderation in their deplorable disorders.¹ We can classify under three heads those happy influences which counterbalance the impulses of evil passions—namely, other passions contrary to the dominant vice ; a certain inherent uprightness ; and, finally, some remnant of faith.

8. First, then, the other human passions. Just as a solitary tree grows to a vast size, while if crowded amongst others in the forest it does not spread itself abroad, so certain vices are impeded and arrested in their development by other contrary vices. Thus, avarice can keep a man from going far in debauchery ; again, and more frequently still, the passion of honour and the care for reputation will make

¹ The dominant defect of the character makes great havoc in cases where no obstacles are opposed, either by nature or grace—that is to say, in those who reject all the appeals of Divine grace. It is this which makes, and has always made, the greatest miscreants that the world has ever seen, and of these the majority have let themselves be carried away by an evil disposition, which could have been resisted had they chosen. Anger, revenge, cruelty, hate, envy, avarice, the sins of the flesh, and a host of stupendous crimes, proceed very often from a defect of character ; and then, as a rule, the sinner is drawn into great excesses, unless, indeed, some obstacle is encountered " (Libermann, *Écrits Spirituels*, p. 242).

him avoid many an error. How many souls resist their evil inclinations in this way, and without much merit prevent them from acquiring that ascendancy which they otherwise would do! It is clear that those who meet with no other obstacles than these in the way of evil are apt to go far in sin, and, though they may preserve certain external decencies, are at bottom extremely bad. Such people feel an intense dislike for the good, which betrays itself in ridicule, in attacks upon religion and its ministers, etc.; for the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart, and the heart of these unfortunate sinners is full of corruption and hate.

9. Natural reason, the sense of honour, and the instinctive horror which vice inspires, are also causes why many restrain themselves and avoid the last excesses of sin. These sinners frequently possess good qualities and natural virtues in a fair state of development; but they are very imperfectly instructed as to their religious duties, and this ignorance excuses them in part (*non a toto sed a tanto*, as theologians say); they are less guilty than might be supposed. When men of this kind live outside all Christian influence, in countries where religious indifference predominates, they are apt to conceive very incomplete and sometimes grotesque ideas as to their duty towards God. Thus, they imagine that they are good Christians because they love religion and hold the impious in abhorrence, while they themselves are neglecting the most essential religious practices, such as the fulfilment of their Easter duties or the attendance at Sunday Mass. It is even difficult to make them understand the importance and gravity of these precepts; thus, they are far from being altogether bad: they are more ignorant and foolish than wicked, and if they sometimes take part in conversations against religion, it is rather through weakness and human respect than impiety.

10. Finally and chiefly, it is faith which restrains many a sinner on the downward career—faith which still remains

in his heart, weakened, no doubt, diminished, but not extinct. This faint glimmer of faith continues to shine in their souls, thanks to a special protection from God, or to a remnant of early teaching which has left its deep traces, or, again, to the salutary influence of a Christian environment. Thus it is that sinners who dwell in countries where faith still holds its empire, and in truly Christian families, especially if they do not at the same time suffer from the bad influence of irreligious friends, have right beliefs even while they do evil. It is true that they are often eager to stifle these troublesome convictions—*noluit intelligere ut bene ageret* (he has refused to understand that he might act well)—but whether they hold them willingly or against the grain, in their inmost consciences they do homage to the truth. As a rule, in souls like these, there is an astonishing mixture of good and evil sentiments ; we must not, then, take their protestations of unbelief too literally, just as we should be much mistaken in branding as hypocritical those signs of faith which they sometimes exhibit in the very midst of their disorders.

But if we must not think them worse than they are, we should not, on the other hand, take a too favourable view of their case, as they themselves are often apt to do. Indeed, they are much exposed to self-delusion. Evil habit has blunted their conscience, and made their gravest sins appear to them as little worthy of blame, while at the same time, self-love, which keeps them from acknowledging themselves to be in the wrong, the good feelings which still remain in them, and which are only velleities—that is to say, approbations of the judgment rather than true acts of will—all this deceives them as to their own state. Like Pilate, they wash their hands, because they feel a certain anxiety not to crucify their God, but that does not hinder them from sacrificing Him to their interests and their pleasures.

§ 4. *The Different Degrees of Obduracy.*

11. We have shown the causes which produce hardness of heart, and the obstacles which, on the other hand, hinder the progress of the evil. Now, if we examine the effects which result from these opposing influences, it will finally appear that there are four kinds of sinners who are confirmed in wrongdoing.

12. The first are those who sin through ignorance. As to this first class, we have in view those, we believe, numerous cases where ignorance and lack of understanding with regard to the things of faith cannot be imputed to them for sin. And so, if they are not otherwise guilty, God will judge these poor people with great mercy. If He has said, *Cui multum datum est, multum quæretur ab eo* (Much will be required of him to whom much has been given), it is clear that He will require little of those who have received little. Now, there are some who have really received very little. When Christian education has been altogether wanting or greatly neglected ; when a man has lived in the midst of indifference, where God was never named, where the fulfilment of religious duties has encountered almost insurmountable hindrances (a state of things which tends to make him violate them habitually and without scruple), is it surprising that the conscience has remained or has become far from sensitive ? Many of the sins that these unfortunates commit, sins which would be very serious for enlightened Christians, are much less grave for them. Indeed, if they have avoided the sins from which they shrank with most horror—if, besides this, they have preserved their respect for religion and really Christian sentiments, they are not far from the kingdom of God. Some simple opportunity, such as admission to a Catholic club or a Christian confraternity, will often suffice to bring them back to their duties. They are kept in a state of sin by the absence of good habits or by human respect, and when once these obstacles (which are rather

exterior than such as affect the inmost soul) are counterbalanced by the aids that are offered them, they return to God without much difficulty.

Unhappily, after their conversion the greater number continue lukewarm or, rather, very ignorant. Thus, with such persons, it will be necessary, for instance, to return frequently to the charge in order to get them to understand that to miss Mass, to get drunk, and so on, is no light fault, as they would gladly believe, but a really grave one.

Their faith is so unenlightened, their false ideas are so deeply rooted in their minds, that without any great culpability on their part they will cling to their old errors for a long time. It is therefore greatly to be desired that they should not be left to themselves after their conversion, but that every possible means should be taken to complete their religious instruction and mould them to more Christian ideas.

13. In the second place, there are the sinners who fall into vice through weakness. These retain some desire to do well, they regret the evil that they commit, they love and esteem virtuous people, but at the fatal moment the intoxication of passion makes them beside themselves ; they become dizzy, fascinated, and succumb. They sin also by impulse, or because they have not the necessary courage to accomplish an unpleasant duty. These are doubtless but accidental falls, from which they might recover ; but beyond this such sinners suffer from a tendency to discouragement, which keeps them in sin. Knowing themselves to be weak and irresolute, and having therefore no hope of breaking their bonds or making any vigorous efforts, they drift on through softness and cowardice, and make no attempt to emerge from their deplorable condition.

These, again, are not very bad, or very far gone in sin. And so, even when they are inclined to be slightly boastful as to their evil courses, they are not to be taken too seriously, or thought incapable of amendment.

14. The third class is that of the careless and indifferent. They hardly trouble to find out whether their actions are legitimate or forbidden ; their only idea is to revel in every possible pleasure. In these unhappy people the voice of conscience is almost stifled. Their state is one of spiritual blindness, a condition which is exceedingly dangerous and offensive to God, to Whom they give so little heed. In this state of complete carelessness, faith becomes much weakened, and often altogether extinguished, while there is much less hope of their conversion. Such persons are known to die quite peacefully in impenitence, and they go into eternity without fear or anxiety. Ignorance has much to do with their condition, and doubtless God will judge them with less severity ; but if it is the result of a wilful blindness, of a determination to ignore the stings of conscience, their condition is indeed deplorable.

15. Finally, there are the sinners who sin out of mere wantonness, knowing and perfectly understanding the gravity of their disorders, their irreligion, or their vices, and cheerfully making up their minds to do evil. We can place in the same class those who commit sin from vexation or wounded pride. They began going wrong through weakness ; then, when their disorders drew on them well-merited humiliations, their self-love was wounded, and they avenged themselves by plunging further into the abyss. Both of these classes are not merely indifferent, like those of whom we spoke before, but actually hostile ; they feel a repugnance for virtue and a hatred for the good. If they wilfully cherish this hatred of good, it in time assumes frightful proportions, and they end by displaying the furious rage of demons and lost souls. Such are the initiates in those higher grades of the secret societies, those energumens of whose frightful orgies, blasphemies, and satanic acts we cannot read without a shudder. They have allowed the evil spirit to assume such a power over them, they follow out his suggestions with such readiness and promptitude,

that we can say of them, in reversing the words of St. Paul, that it is no longer they who live, but Satan who lives in them.¹

§ 5. *How to proceed with Regard to such Sinners.*

16. How must we act towards these unhappy beings who are plunged in sin ? How are we to cast out Satan, who has taken up his permanent abode in their hearts ? The Gospel tells us that the Apostles, to whom our Lord had given the power to cast out devils, found one day that they were baffled by one of these wicked spirits, who resisted all their exorcisms. Jesus Himself was obliged to intervene before Satan would give up his prey. The Apostles in astonishment then asked the Saviour, “ Why could not we cast him out ? ” “ This kind,” replied the Divine Master, “ can go out by nothing, but by prayer and fasting ” (Mark ix. 27).² Prayer and mortification—such, in fact, are the often indispensable and only means of procuring the conversion of inveterate sinners ; any price, however great,

¹ All those who, without going to these lengths, call the devil to their aid, in one manner or another, give that malignant enemy of souls a very formidable hold over them ; they will need a great effort to shake off the yoke which they have thus placed on their shoulders. The first use which the demon makes of the power which has thus been given him is to hinder them from confessing their sins. For the same reason certain superstitious, or rather diabolical, practices, such as table-turning, are very dangerous, because every appeal, even implicit, to the tempter increases his strength, and the most deplorable results may ensue. The Church, in praying God, as she does in one of her collects, to deliver them from all contact with the evil spirit, shows herself a true mother, watchful over the needs of her children.

² This dumb devil still makes ravages of souls, for is it not he who stops on the very lips of certain penitents the confession of their sins ? And so every confessor should remember the words of our Lord, praying and cheerfully offering his fasts and penances to drive Satan out of the hearts that he possesses and keeps prisoners in the bondage of sacrilege.

must be paid to obtain from God those more than ordinary graces necessary to touch these hardened hearts.

We know what the Curé d'Ars said to a priest who complained of not being able to convert his parishioners : " Have you fasted ? have you held vigils ? have you taken the discipline ? As long as you have not tried such means as these, do not think that you have done everything possible."

17. The priest is the continuer of the work of Jesus on earth. Into what an illusion would he fall, did he think to save souls without having recourse to the means employed by his Saviour. For us Jesus offered Himself to the strokes of the Divine Justice. " Father," said He, " strike Me. I consent to pay the debt of all these iniquities, but forgive the sinners, for they know not what they do." The priest, who is another Christ—*sacerdos alter Christus*—must also himself do penance for his brethren. There are souls who, even in the midst of their disorders, seem to be the object of the specially tender care of Divine Providence. They are pursued by remorse far more than others ; their faith remains bright and alive ; they are preserved, in a way that we cannot account for, from the dangers in which so many others are lost. Whence comes this privilege ? It is that God has let Himself be touched by the prayers of some faithful soul ; the sacrifices which it offers to Him appease His justice and hold back the sword of chastisement, and they end by winning from His mercy graces which are, so to speak, irresistible.

Now, who can and who ought to render this immense service to poor sinners but the priest of God ? He has not been called to the dignity of the priesthood for his own advantage, but for the good of his brethren. *Christianus propter se, sacerdos propter alios* (He is a Christian for himself, a priest for others).

Oh, how happy at the day of judgment will be those priests who have offered themselves as victims for sinners—who have sacrificed everything and sacrificed themselves for the salvation of their brethren !

18. Let us, then, always put supernatural means first. It would appear superfluous to enunciate so evident a truth ; is it, however, generally recognized ? Are not those persons very numerous, on the contrary, whose whole activity, whose whole zeal, is employed in the pursuit of skilful methods, in the working-out of the designs of a purely human ingenuity ? Cleverness and diplomacy are of very little use when it is a question of breaking the bonds of sin and restoring charity to a hardened heart. Human means may serve to render the employment of supernatural means possible : they may be like the bait which conceals the hook in the hands of the fishers of men ; but we must be on our guard against giving them an importance which they do not possess, of attributing to them the principal part. Methods which are simply human can obtain merely human results ; the conversion of souls is a Divine work, and only the Divine Workman can bring it to a happy conclusion.

19. After prayer and penance—*Bona est oratio cum jejunio* (Prayer is good when it is joined with fasting, Tob. xii. 6)—which touch the heart of God and obtain His all-powerful help, one of the most efficacious supernatural methods is the apostolic training of devoted fellow-labourers, who may be better able to approach the sinner and work at his conversion than the ministers of God themselves. The general who trains good officers greatly increases his chances of victory ; he who would do everything by himself will very soon feel his impotence, whatever his personal qualities may be. In heathen countries the missionaries, in their apostolic labours, employ the aid of catechists, true precursors, who prepare the way and dispose the pagans to receive the good news. This method is resorted to in all missionary countries, as much among the civilized nations of the Far East as among the negroes of Africa. In parishes where religious fervour is at a low ebb the number of sinners is often considerable ; and one of the first cares of a devoted shepherd should be the forma-

tion of a chosen band of Christians to act as his valuable lieutenants in the combat against evil.

They will first help him by their prayers. Ten just men would have saved Sodom. How many modern Sodoms have been saved by the unknown saints who dwelt within them ! How many parishes remain solidly Christian, thanks to the blessing drawn down on them by the holy souls who live there, in spite of the fury of hell, in spite of all the active measures employed in these days by the enemies of the Church !

These fervent souls are of the greatest assistance in the work of reclaiming sinners. It is relatively rare that a sinner can be reached directly by the priest. The first steps towards his conversion are usually made by some zealous Christian, whether man or woman, whose good influence is exercised on the sinner with a gentle prudence that brings him back almost unconsciously to God. Now, it is especially the souls that are fundamentally pious who succeed in this kind of apostolate.

20. If the priest cannot bring these veterans in sin into touch with some such true servants of God, he must himself labour to gain an influence over their minds by entering into friendly relations with them, showing sympathy with their troubles, lavishing on them every devoted care, and thus gaining their hearts. But at the same time let him not conceal his desire to win them to God, let him not omit any opportunity of giving them good advice—in short, let him act as a priest in all circumstances, and show himself the true representative and follower of Jesus Christ.

Let him preach especially by example ; the spectacle of a priest's holy life produces more impression on sinners than he is apt to imagine. Let him not seek to shine by an ostentatious display of learning, or by the brilliancy of merely human eloquence, or other qualities which are purely natural. The preoccupations of vanity, besides being exceedingly displeasing to God and apt to arrest the bestowal of His graces, by no means escape un-

noticed, and, far from increasing, diminish the prestige of the priest of Jesus Christ. Of course, there is no question of his aspiring to be taken for an angel, exempt from human imperfections. Let him be known as one who, though subject like his brother men to many an imperfection, and humbly acknowledging his failings, yet seeks by all the means in his power to overcome them, and by his generous efforts and persevering prayers obtains from God efficacious graces which little by little work his transformation. Then will his virtues preach better than his words ; the good will be encouraged to imitate them, and the very sinners will find their faith revive, and the desire to lead a more Christian life will spring up in them once again.

21. As to the external measures for dealing with souls in a state of sin, we can divide them into two classes—the methods which are slow and continuous, and those which are rapid and extraordinary. The first kind require greater perseverance, but they are more fruitful in results ; the hardened heart softens little by little, faith enters quietly in, and extends its empire insensibly until it has gained possession of the whole soul. We can thus do a great deal of good to those who have grown old in sin by persuading them to make a habit of reading good books or newspapers, of often going to hear sermons, and of frequenting the company of enlightened and well-instructed Christians. Their ideas tend to become unconsciously modified ; the good examples which they see, and the good words which they hear, fall on their souls like the gentle dew from heaven upon a parched but still living plant. Under this influence the fruit will germinate, will develop, and, when it is ripe, will fall off by itself, and then an opportunity is all that will be required to finish the work of conversion.

22. As to the extraordinary means, God often acts by them in a manner as sudden as it is potent—in pilgrimages,¹

¹ By pilgrimages we mean, of course, real pilgrimages, such as that of Lourdes, which have a Christian atmosphere about them, and which are really admirable and touching manifestations of faith.

retreats, or missions. The results of these are even greater than could be expected ; the good are encouraged and strengthened, the fervour of the lukewarm is rekindled, secret sinners return to the path of virtue, and those who have been living in sacrilege revert to a right and reverent use of the Holy Sacraments which they have abused. As to public sinners, all are not converted, and even among those who are, all do not persevere ; but the good seed is sown in their hearts, and if God permits, the time will come when these past graces will bring forth their hidden fruit to the light of day.

23. The kind of people of whom we are now speaking do not present themselves at the sacred tribunal of penance until the eve of their marriage day. Then, if there still remain in these hardened sinners some Christian sentiments, some recollections of a better life in the past, of a first Communion fervently made, it may be possible momentarily to touch their hearts, and to induce them by the consideration of the eternal truths to make good resolutions for the future. In any case, and however great their impiety may be, it is well to recall to their minds the importance of their religious duties, to show them how hateful in the sight of God is a life spent altogether without Him, without a prayer, without a thought of the Master Whom all must fear—a life that treats Him to Whom we owe everything as if He did not exist. On such occasions we could not do better than recommend to the couple (especially when one of them has remained faithful to his or her religious duties) the excellent practice of prayer in common, and to exhort them to remain faithful to it from the first days of their marriage.

CHAPTER II

DISSIPATED AND SENSUAL SOULS : THEIR PURELY NATURAL LIFE

§ I. *Dispositions of these Souls.*

24. "THERE are," says St. Teresa (*Interior Castle*, chap. i.), "very different ways of being in this castle ; many souls live in the courtyard of the building where the sentinels stand, neither caring to enter further, nor to know who dwells in that most delightful place, what is in it, and what it contains.

" Certain books on prayer, as you have read, advise the soul to enter into itself, and this is what I mean. I was recently told by a very learned man that souls without prayer are like bodies palsied and lame, having hands and feet they cannot use. Just so, there are souls so infirm and accustomed to think of nothing but earthly matters that there seems no cure for them. It appears impossible for them to retire into their own hearts ; they are so accustomed to be with the reptiles and other creatures which live outside the castle as to come at last to imitate their habits. Though these souls are by their nature so richly endowed, capable of communion even with God Himself, yet their case seems hopeless."

Thus there are souls who only live an animal life, the life of the senses, in whom the Christian spirit is very undeveloped, and who are in great danger of being lost, as the Saint declares.

25. Christians of this kind are numerous, even in favoured parishes. At first sight they can hardly be distinguished from true Christians ; the same cloak of religion covers both, just as the same uniform clothes both the brave and the cowardly soldier. But just as bad soldiers have nothing of the soldier about them but the dress, so for these people religion seems to be reduced to mere exterior formalities ;

it does not penetrate to the depth of their souls, and it exercises very little influence over their conduct or their life.

In some cases, thanks to a Christian education, a good disposition, or other favourable circumstances, they have been preserved from glaring faults. They are relatively good, the world has a favourable opinion of them, and they do not merit any severe censure. These cases are, however, rare. The greater number commit grave sins from time to time, whether publicly or privately. Then, when they have to go to confession before Holy Communion—at Easter, for instance—they have still sufficient faith to elicit that degree of contrition which is just sufficient for absolution, and they turn over a new leaf for the time being. But their good-will is so weak, the eternal truths, which they hardly ever stop to consider, have made so little impression on them, that there is often good reason to be doubtful as to their repentance, and relapses are, so to speak, inevitable.

These people only observe what is strictly necessary with regard to Christian practice. They assist at Mass on Sundays, and at rare intervals, and with many distractions, say a few vocal prayers. Spiritual reading, devotional exercises, only fill them with weariness, and, indeed, they never think of them, so absorbed are they in material pre-occupations. Their minds are not concerned with these things, and if some external influence should happen to bring them into the region of the spiritual world, they find themselves uneasy in these surroundings, and do not stay there long.

The ordinary ideas of these souls, their habitual desires and pre-occupations, the day-dreams which haunt their imaginations, are all purely natural ; scarcely ever, if at all, any more serious reflections inspired by faith ; never any desire for amendment. If they possess some little virtue, if they occasionally show capacity for self-denial, or sacrifice themselves for the sake of their relations or friends, it

is not that they are following the inspirations of grace—their motive is a natural instinct or some purely human consideration. If they try to overcome their defects, it is far more from human motives than from Christian principles—rather to save themselves from the unpleasant consequences of sin than to avoid the wrong-doing for fear of offending God.

At long intervals, grace inspires them with some right feelings ; their faith is awakened ; some brilliant religious function or extraordinary circumstance produces a good impression upon them. So again, after falls, especially if of a graver nature than usual, they will feel some remorse ; but, in the ordinary course of life apart from these circumstances, they scarcely ever hear that still small voice of God, that gentle whisper which demands calm and recollection in the hearer—*non in commotione Dominus* (3 Kings xix. 11). The Lord speaks but rarely in the midst of tumult and confusion, and these souls, altogether given over to dissipation, are scarcely capable of hearing Him.

These unhappy ones can hardly, then, be said to lead a Christian life ; faith still lives in the depth of their hearts, but it is, as it were, torpid ; their days are empty of merit in the sight of God, and their salvation is in great danger. They may be kept in this state by external circumstances ; if they are surrounded by Christian influences, and preserved from contact with bad company and from dangerous occasions, they will not commit grave errors. But if these external helps should happen to fail them—if they should be, for instance, removed into infidel or indifferent surroundings, they will quickly lose their good habits, weary of their religious practices, and soon become like unto those who surround them.

26. The state which we have just described is that of many young people who belong to careless families, and whose religious education is not yet completed. They hear the things of faith but rarely mentioned, and how are they likely to be able to avoid a life of frivolity and sensuality ? Other chil-

dren who have made some progress in the Christian life fall back into this state after their first Communion. During their time of preparation they succeeded in making some efforts ; the looking forward to this sublime act, combined with the numerous instructions and exhortations which they received, touched their souls and developed their faith ; but when these good influences cease, they relapse into their former state of torpor and frivolity, and are in great danger of slipping down the slope of evil and falling into the abyss.

§ 2. How to inspire these Souls with Better Dispositions.

27. How must we set about the task of rousing these souls from their state of frivolity and inspiring them with some desire for the Christian life ?

Let us say, once for all, that the two great means mentioned above as indispensable in the case of the conversion of hardened sinners, prayer and penance, are always the most powerful instruments in doing good to souls, whatever the degree of the spiritual life to which they may have attained, and they will give a far greater efficacy to all the other means that we may seek to employ. The director ought never to forget that such persons as these, who are plunged in the life of the senses, cannot see the truth as clearly as he sees it, being blinded by their passions ; he must therefore abstain from urging on them certain considerations, excellent in themselves, and of a nature to produce a good impression on more advanced souls, but beyond the capacity of those of whom we are treating. Above all, he must seek to enlighten them, and must therefore frequently recall to their minds the eternal truths—heaven, hell, the goodness of God and His fatherly providence, the love which is so conspicuous in the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Passion, insisting on the importance of eternal salvation, the nothingness of this life compared to eternity. It is thus that St. Ignatius converted St. Francis Xavier, by

constantly repeating to him, though with prudence and kindness, these words of our Lord : " What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul ? "

28. And while we try in this way to enlighten the understanding, we must also work upon the will, direct it to God, and help it to elicit such acts as it is capable of. And here the most practical point to insist on with regard to these souls is the regular habit of attentive prayer. While these prayers accustom them to act in a supernatural way, they will touch the heart of God, and obtain a more abundant light for their poor blinded souls.

Our aim being to extricate these souls from this state of carelessness, and to inspire them with some desire for progress, we must make them realize how greatly we have their conversion at heart ; this will impress them more than the best arguments.

If they fall frequently into mortal sin, the Holy Ghost's action on their souls will manifest itself only after their falls, when He excites uneasiness and remorse in their consciences. Disgust for sin, fear, shame, the desire to flee from vice—such are the sentiments inspired in them by the Divine Spirit. The director must second this action of the Holy Ghost ; with all gentleness and compassion he must pity them, and share in their expressions of regret and their fears of falling unprepared into the hands of the Supreme Judge. Then he will remind them that if nature is weak, grace is powerful, and that the most guilty sinners have, with the help of God, returned to the paths of virtue.

29. As to children who are in this state, they are, of course, less culpable than adults, for they have abused grace less, and thus they are more susceptible to happier influences ; but then, again, the thoughtlessness of their age causes the good impressions that they receive to be less durable.

To do them any real good it will be necessary to bring them to the Sacrament of Penance once a month, even

before they have made their first Communion, and to urge them not to wait till the month is over, if they should have the misfortune to fall into mortal sin. We must also insist strongly on the necessity of serving God, and on the motives which urge us to work out our salvation. As a general rule, it will not be very hard to inspire good desires and good feelings in these childish hearts.

The most common danger for souls that are still weak in virtue, comes undoubtedly from bad companions. How many children are thus led into evil ways ! How many young men and young women thus become accustomed, without the knowledge of their parents or masters, to listen to wicked and impious remarks which shake their faith, or to impure conversations which arouse their evil passions ! A prudent director warns them beforehand against this danger ; he does not wait for the evil to be done before proceeding to remedy it, but tries his best to forestall it, either by fatherly admonitions, or, if he suspects the presence of danger, by inquiring as to the company they keep and how they employ their time. Without this watchfulness, we run the risk of seeing the agents of the Evil One overthrow in a very short time the edifice which we have been at such pains to construct.

THE PURGATIVE WAY

INTRODUCTION

30. WHEN a soul begins, in ever so small a degree to be exercised by a sincere desire to lead a Christian life, it enters on the purgative way, which is the first degree of charity.

According to Suarez : “*Charitas incipiens vocabitur illa quæ a concupiscentiis et aliis passionibus nondum mortificatis non solum impeditur ne facile et delectabiliter virtutem operetur, sed etiam in periculo peccati mortalis versatur. Et hic status dicitur pugnæ et vice purgativæ quia in illo præcipua cura debet esse resistendi concupiscentiis et mortificandi passiones, nutriendo simul et fovendo charitatem ipsam.*”¹

Suarez, in this definition, only explains and develops the teaching of St. Thomas, who says : “*Primo quidem incumbit homini studium principale ad recedendum a peccato et resistendum concupiscentiis epis quæ in contrarium charitatis movent; et hoc pertinet ad incipientes in quibus charitas est nutrienda vel fovenda, ne corrumperatur.*”²

The purgative way, or way of beginners, therefore, is that in which the soul fights against sin, struggles with more or less success against its failings and vices, and if it should still fall from time to time, rises again, and is able to retrieve its faults.

Saint Teresa divides the purgative way into two parts ; let us begin by seeing what she says of the first.

¹ The charity of beginners is that which, hindered by concupiscence and other passions not yet brought into subjection, finds neither facility nor pleasure in the exercise of virtue, and even goes in danger of mortal sin. This is what is called the state of conflict, or the purgative way, because the principal duty of souls in these dispositions is to resist their evil desires and mortify their passions by nourishing and developing charity. *De Statu religioso*, Lib. I., cap. iii.

² “In the first place, the principal duty involveth on a man is to turn away from sin and to resist all passions which are opposed to charity ; and this pertains to beginners, in whom charity must be cherished and strengthened, lest it be corrupted.” (2, 2, q. 24, a. 9, e.)

BOOK I

FIRST DEGREE—BELIEVING SOULS

CHAPTER I

PORTRAIT OF BELIEVING SOULS

§ I. *The Doctrine of Saint Teresa and of Blessed Henry Suso.*

31. "As far as I can understand," says St. Teresa, "the gate by which we are to enter the castle¹ is prayer and meditation.

"I do not allude more to mental than to vocal prayer; for if it is a prayer at all, the mind must take part in it. If a person neither considers to Whom he is addressing himself, what he asks, nor what he is who ventures to speak to God, although his lips may utter many words, I do not call it prayer."

These souls who thus make the first step to enter the precincts of the castle "are still very worldly, yet have some desire to do right, and at times, though rarely, commend themselves to God's care. They think about their souls

¹ The castle, according to the Saint, is the place where God dwells, the paradise wherein He takes his recreation, as He Himself declares—*i.e.*, the soul of the just man (*The First Mansion*, chap. i.). When the soul enters into herself by prayer and consideration, she enters into this castle, and there finds her God. The Saint describes seven "mansions" in this castle, each more beautiful than the last, in proportion as the soul, becoming more faithful, unites herself more intimately to God, who communicates to her an ever-growing splendour.

every now and then ; although very busy, they pray a few times a month, with their minds generally filled with a thousand other matters, for where their treasure is, there is their heart also. Still, occasionally they cast aside these cares ; it is a great boon for them to realize to some extent the state of their souls, and to see that they will never reach the gate by the road they are following" (*The First Mansion*, chap. i.).

"Although only the first mansion, this contains great riches, and such treasures that, if the soul can only manage to elude the reptiles dwelling here, it cannot fail to advance further." These reptiles are vicious inclinations, the love of pleasure, riches, and honours, from which the souls in this mansion are far from being detached. The danger for them is therefore great. As they are "still absorbed in the world, immersed in its pleasures, and eager for its honours and distinctions, the vassals of their souls, the senses and powers bestowed on them by God, are weak, and such people are easily vanquished, though desirous not to offend God" (*ibid.*, chap. ii.).

These souls have as yet but little light. "They resemble a person entering a chamber full of brilliant sunshine, with eyes clogged and half closed with mud. The room itself is light, but he cannot see because of his self-imposed impediment."

"Those conscious of being in this state must as often as possible have recourse to His Majesty, taking His Blessed Mother and the Saints for their advocates to do battle for them, because we creatures possess little strength for self-defence. . . . To enter the second mansion it is [also] most important to withdraw from all unnecessary cares and business, as far as compatible with the duties of one's state of life" (*ibid.*).

32. Let us compare this teaching of the reformer of Carmel with that which we read of the inhabitants of the first rock in the *Dialogue of the Nine Rocks*.¹

¹ A little German work of the fourteenth century, in which a vision of the Blessed Henry Suso, O.P., is related. It was long

"These inhabitants are lukewarm and cowardly souls who do not labour at the work of their perfection ; they are content with the will to avoid mortal sin, and this satisfies them until the hour of their death, and they never, during the whole course of their lives, think that more could be done. . . . If they die without mortal sin, they will be saved, but they are in greater danger than they think for, because they imagine that it is possible to obey God and their nature at the same time. Now, it is very difficult, and in a sense impossible, to persevere thus in the grace of God. However, if they do persevere, they will be saved, but there awaits them a terrible purgatory, in which they will be forced to expiate by long and severe sufferings the gratification of all their fancies, great and small ; and when they are purified, they will go to heaven to receive their reward and crown, which will be small and poor in comparison with the crowns destined for men of high courage ; for they have lived without fatigue and fought without energy or a generous love of God. . . . The demon has not the power to vanquish the dwellers on this first rock without their own consent. It is true that he has a good chance of leading them astray, because they live absorbed in the thoughts and business of the world, and love the honours, the pleasures, of nature, of the body, of the senses. They do not apply themselves to the work of their spiritual advancement . . . they know very little of the peace and joy of the soul, for to have that it is necessary before all things to combat nature and to vanquish it."

thought to be the work of the saintly Dominican himself. Father Denifle, however, attributes it to Rulmann Merswin, who lived at the same epoch. However this may be, the little work is of real value, both from its antiquity and from the spiritual lessons which it teaches.

§ 2. *Pious Practices, Interior Dispositions, and External Conduct of the Souls in this First Degree.*

33. *Pious Practices.*—Souls of this first degree are those who devote themselves in some small measure to the practices of religion ; they meditate from time to time on spiritual things ; they have at least some conception of the greatness of God and the seriousness of their duties towards Him. They pray, and sometimes, when they need some temporal favour, pray with a certain fervour.

Their piety does not go further than this. Recollection is a thing unknown to them ; devotional exercises have but little charm ; if circumstances oblige them to take part in them, they do so against the grain and without profit.

34. *Interior Dispositions.*—Thoughts suggested by faith are thus not altogether strangers to these Christians ; they do not arise spontaneously, but neither are any very extraordinary events required to evoke them. If threatened with some trial, or if some misfortune seems about to overwhelm them, they at once have recourse to God and make their appeal to His goodness, for they feel immediately that He is their best Protector. Sermons, ceremonies, the feasts and solemnities of the Church, usually produce a good impression on them ; they prepare themselves to receive the Sacraments, if not with fervour, at least in a proper manner.

We said that these thoughts suggested by faith do not arise spontaneously in their hearts ; in fact, except for the occasions first mentioned, in the whole course of their lives they think little about God ; their ordinary thoughts and preoccupations are altogether natural, and if you could read their hearts to the bottom, you would find that their desires, their dreams, hopes, and cares, are fixed, as a rule, on temporal advantages, and very seldom on those of a spiritual order. Their ways of looking at things, their judgments, and so on, are purely natural ; they have very

little perception of Divine things. Their resolution to remain faithful to God is nevertheless sincere, but it is without fervour or much stability.

However, it is true that we often find amongst them, and even amongst Christians less good than they, sentiments of fidelity to the cause of God and of antipathy to the impious, so ardent and so strong that they would seem to presume a more perfect state of soul, a far more developed charity. How is it that they have so lively a faith when they have so little love ? It is very true that faith is a marvellous gift, in which the all-merciful dealings of God are revealed with extraordinary splendour. This supernatural virtue, so deeply planted in the human heart as to seem ineradicable, this disposition to accept the most profound mysteries without the least hesitation, this steadfastness which causes the believer to remain unshaken by the most deplorable scandals, the most specious objections, or the most terrible temptations—all this, indeed, shows the hand of God. Even sin itself, unless it is directly opposed to faith, does not destroy it ; and if the sinner does not wish to throw off the yoke, if he continues to make acts of this virtue, his faith remains both profound and lively. It is not astonishing, then, that this virtue attains to a great development, and this even when love is lukewarm and languid. We are inclined to think, however, that in the good dispositions of which we have been speaking all is not supernatural. Beside the sentiments inspired by grace, there are other analogous feelings which are purely natural, such as attachment to the cause of religion, a certain human pride (which is, indeed, lawful enough) in a mind that feels itself in possession of the truth, which clings to its own opinion, and regards those on the side of error with contempt, and as adversaries to be combated. St. Francis of Sales, in his treatise on the *Love of God* (Book IV., chaps. ix., x.), speaks of a divine love, imperfect and natural, which accompanies true charity, and can continue to exist even when the latter is destroyed by sin. And he shows how, in this last case—

that is to say, when it survives true charity—this imperfect love is dangerous, as being liable to put people on the wrong scent and make them think themselves better than they really are. It is the same with the natural sentiments with which we are dealing : they are good and useful when joined to an enlightened faith, but they may do injury to those whose conduct is not in accord with their principles, deceiving them as to their true state and blinding them as to its dangers.

35. *External Conduct*.—In their external conduct we at once notice that these souls know nothing of Christian abnegation ; they may make some efforts at distant intervals, but they have little stability, and dissipation of mind soon makes an end of their weak resolutions. These souls have natural rather than supernatural virtues.

If they have been preserved from grave faults and have received a Christian education, they may be able to continue to avoid mortal sin and keep their horror of evil, and thus remain all their lives without either great faults or great virtues. In this category are a great number of souls who have been but little enlightened by the inspirations of grace, either because they are not very intelligent, or because, they have not received much education as regards piety. Having no very fierce temptations, they lead a quiet and correct life, but they do not seem destined for a very high reward. We are sometimes astonished at the little delicacy of conscience which is to be found in souls who in the best possible faith imagine that their lives are almost blameless. This comes from their taking scarcely any heed except as to external acts of sin, and not thinking much of the evil motions of the soul, of the ill-restrained desires, or those interior feelings which are more or less opposed to the law of God. Such souls are indeed very frail, and some particularly dangerous occasion would be exceedingly formidable for them. If, on the other hand, they have known evil, they easily succumb to the least temptations, and may

thus fall into a state of indifference or habitual sin. As to venial sin, they, like the last named, trouble little about it ; they take no pains to combat their defects of character, temper, laziness, vanity, greediness, avarice, etc. ; they often have an affection for one or other of these defects, and therefore do not repent of it. Sometimes they recognize their faults, and, when the occasion is over, regret their weakness ; but with regard to these venial sins their purpose of amendment is feeble enough, and there is little hope of improvement.

36. Such are the common characteristics of Christians who inhabit this first mansion. "There are in this mansion," says St. Teresa, "many rooms." We can, in fact, divide these dwellers in the first mansion into the following classes :

(1) *Beginners*—i.e., children who are only entering on the Christian life, and certain converts who have but recently returned to God, and whose good dispositions are as yet but newly born.

(2) *Habitués*—i.e., Christians who have been long in the dispositions described above.

(3) *The Relapsed*—i.e., those who once had mounted higher, but have now fallen back into lukewarmness ; thus, Blessed Henry Suso saw multitudes go down again from the higher rocks to this first one.

CHAPTER II

THE DIRECTION OF THE SOULS OF THE FIRST DEGREE

How must we set to work at the perfecting of these souls who are as yet novices in the way of virtue ?

Let us first give the general rules which apply equally to all those who inhabit the first mansion.

SECTION I.—GENERAL RULES.

§ 1. *How we must enlighten these Souls.*

37. *Desire of a Higher Perfection.*—The souls in this first mansion have, as we have said, some desire for the Christian life, some esteem for piety and for the supernatural virtues. The more ardent this desire becomes, the more rapid will be their progress. We must therefore strive, by means of solid instruction and urgent private exhortations, to make them comprehend the beauty of Christian piety and the immense value of the advantages which it will procure for them. Does not God command us to work out our perfection—*Hæc est voluntas Dei sanctificatio vestra* (This is the will of God, even your sanctification) ? St. John Chrysostom observes that this saying of our Lord is addressed to all—*Estote perfecti* (Be ye perfect) *ut sitis perfecti et integri in nullo deficientes* (that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing), as the Apostle St. James exhorted the faithful (Jas. i. 4). “Take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect” (Eph. vi. 13). “Blessed,” said Jesus “are they who hunger and thirst after perfection,¹ for they shall have their fill.”

It will not be difficult to make the beginners understand that while they remain in their tepidity God will find them but sorry servants, with very little love or gratitude in their hearts. Do they, then, wish to continue for ever in this state of mediocrity, which gives occasion for so many defects and sins ? Do they not desire, instead of remaining in the ranks of servants, and even of scarcely faithful servants, to become the *friends* of their God ? The Heart of Jesus, which burns with love for them, calls them to this state ; He has done everything to gain their affection ; the simple remembrance of His benefits, His sacrifices, His

¹ *Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam.* It is well known that in Holy Scripture justice is synonymous with moral perfection.

tender love, ought to be sufficient to excite them to a reciprocal love and devotion.

38. Besides these motives drawn from what is due to God and what God desires of us, there are our own most pressing interests to be considered. We have so much to fear if we neglect the work of our perfection, so much to gain if we devote ourselves to it with fervour. It is easy to demonstrate how lukewarmness, especially in these days, endangers our salvation. And it is equally easy and important to emphasize the advantages of godliness. *Pietas ad omnia utilis est, promissionem habens vitæ quæ nunc est, et futuræ* (Godliness is useful for all ; it carries with it the promise of the present life and of that of the future).

39. *Hope of attaining Perfection.*—But however enviable the state of perfection may appear, the Christians to whom we propose it will not feel the desire for it if they think it quite beyond their strength ; and so we must try to persuade them that, with God's help, it is an easy thing. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* (I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me). Those multitudes, whose virtue now astounds us, had the same nature as ourselves, experienced the same difficulties, endured the same conflicts. *Non potero quod isti et istæ ?* asks St. Augustine.

40. *The Inconstancy of these Souls.*—The desire of godliness must be kept alive with great care in souls which have made but little progress. They are, in fact, unstable ; other cares, other preoccupations, come so quickly sometimes to carry away their newborn fervour. In order to preserve in them this desire for virtue, we must often insist on the considerations which first gave birth to it. We shall gain much if we can persuade them to read good books, but we must take care to choose those which excite their interest, such as certain lives of the Saints, which are as attractive as they are edifying ; for otherwise their goodwill will soon grow weary.

Another cause of inconstancy in these souls is that the checks which they sustain in their battles against self, and

their too frequent falls, often make them think that their efforts are of little avail. A zealous director will be able to sustain their courage and maintain alive in them the hope of attaining perfection. He will rejoice over their little victories, congratulate them on their efforts, however feeble ; he will seize the opportunity of the sacrifices that he has induced them to make, of the victories which they have gained, to point to the final triumph as an assured and certain thing. This great business of the sanctification of a soul is not the work of a day ; it sometimes requires long years of toil, but an invincible perseverance is always rewarded.

§ 2. How we must accustom these Souls to live Christian Lives.

41. And while we labour thus to enlighten the dwellers in the first mansion, we must also introduce them into the true Christian life. This Christian life supposes :

- (1) A frequent intercourse with God in prayer.
- (2) A great fidelity in offering to God all our actions.
- (3) A great steadfastness in removing all the obstacles which would hinder us from serving Him.
- (4) Lastly, an intimate union with God through the Sacraments.

We must therefore accustom these souls, who as yet have only caught a glimpse of the Christian life, to pray well, to act from supernatural motives, to practise self-denial, especially in the struggle against their faults, and, lastly, to receive the Sacraments well and devoutly.

42. *Prayer.*—There are two things which we must require of these novices—regularity and a reverent attention. They must pray, and they must pray well ; we cannot insist too strongly on the importance and the mighty power of prayer, for this is a truth which they do not sufficiently understand. Again, in order to accustom them to pray with devotion, we must remind them from time to time that

before praying they should reflect on what they are going to do, picturing to themselves the greatness and goodness of Him to Whom they are about to speak, and their extreme need of His help. At other times we may teach them to make the sign of the cross with reverence and attention, or, again, propose to them to form a certain definite intention in each prayer that they say.

43. *To do all for God.*—In order to accustom them to live a supernatural life, it is well from time to time to get them to give an account of the way in which, at the beginning of the day, they offered their works and their sufferings to God ; of the care which they have taken during the course of the day to renew this intention of doing everything for Him ; and we should require them to examine their consciences on this point. If their different actions were always lifted to a higher plane by such Christian motives, would they not profit them for all eternity ?¹

44. *The Removal of Obstacles.*—“ Let him who would follow after Me deny himself.” This is one of the fundamental maxims of the Christian life. Who is my chief opponent when I wish to do what is right ? Myself ; for the enemies of my soul, the world, and the devil,

¹ As to Christians who are in a state of grace, and consequently united to God, as to their last end, by charity, St. Thomas teaches that all their deliberate actions are meritorious acts of the supernatural order, provided that they perform them with a good motive, because they necessarily tend to their last end, which is supernatural. *Cum caritas imperet omnibus virtutibus . . . et cum omnis actus bonus ordinetur in finem alicujus virtutis, in finem charitatis ordinatus remanebit et ita meritorius erit, et sic comedere et bibere, servato modo temperantiae, meritorium erit in eo qui caritatem habet, quia Deum ultimum finem vite sue constituit* (Lib. II., Sent. Dist., XL., a. 5). Other theologians teach that a good motive does not suffice, and that every action, to be meritorious, must be inspired by one which is supernatural. However this may be, it is clear that an *explicit* intention of acting for the glory of God greatly enhances the merit, and that it preserves us from the danger of straying beyond the bounds of virtue by acting without reasonable motive, and merely to gratify nature.

can do nothing against me if they do not find an accomplice in myself.

"Self," says Père Grou (*Manuel des âmes intérieures*, p. 154), "is the origin and fount of pride, and consequently of all sin. It is the enemy of God, Whom it attacks in His universal and absolute dominion. It is the enemy of men, whom it turns one against the other, on account of their conflicting interests. It is the enemy of every man, because it estranges him from his true good, because it draws him towards evil, and robs him of peace and rest."

Annihilate the human self, and all crimes disappear from the face of the earth ; all men live together like brothers, share their goods here on earth without jealousy, and mutually console one another in their misfortunes, each regarding his neighbour as another self. Annihilate the human self, and all man's thoughts, his desires, his actions, will turn towards God without any considerations of personal advantage ; God will be loved, adored, served for Himself, because of His infinite perfections, because of His benefits. He will be loved whether He console man or afflict him ; whether He overwhelm him with benefits or put him to the proof ; whether He draw him lovingly to Himself or seem to reject and repulse him. Annihilate the human self, and man, always innocent, will pass his days in an unchangeable peace, because nothing either within or without can trouble him any more. The annihilation of self ought to be the constant task of every true Christian, of every man who desires to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. And it is absolutely necessary to begin this battle against self from the very threshold of the spiritual life ; even at the most tender age we can do nothing solid or lasting without self-denial.

45. *The Struggle against Evil Passions.*—Christian self-denial ought to be directed chiefly against those defects that we recognize in ourselves. If beginners have to fight against some vicious tendency we must sustain and encourage them in this painful conflict. In order to obtain the victory, we should get them to make novenas from time

to time, in which we should join them. We should put this intention before them as the object to be aimed at in their Communions ; and if some unusual opportunity arises, such as a great feast, a retreat, or a pilgrimage, we should remind them that this grace, before all others, must be made the object of their special supplications. To keep them from becoming hardened in sin, we should accustom them to repent of their faults *without delay* ; and when they accuse themselves of having fallen, we should inquire if they took care to ask God's pardon at once after committing the sin, and then give them a penance for the future, such as to throw themselves at the foot of the crucifix *immediately* after falling into sin, and implore God's mercy.

46. *Lighter Faults*.—As to venial sins, such souls think too little of these ; and so it is important to inculcate a great horror of them, and to order a special watchfulness as to this point. We should urge them to take their defects one after another, and to make a relentless war against each in turn. This is specially necessary for those who are sheltered from grave temptations and do not fall into mortal sin.

47. *Spirit of Mortification*.—These souls already have the opportunity of practising Christian self-denial by merely trying not to sin. But this is to remain on the defensive only, and in order to gain the victory it is good tactics to assume the offensive. Now, to assume the offensive in this case means to practise mortification and sacrifice. St. Teresa, as we have seen, mentions the giving up of all unnecessary occupations as one of the conditions of progress for souls in the first mansion ; indeed, while superfluities and worldly cares entirely occupy the hearts of these Christians, how can they possibly make any progress ? We must therefore induce them to detach themselves in some degree from the inanities which enslave them. No doubt these sacrifices will not at first be very numerous or very severe, but this will come little by little ; especially, if we take care to make them comprehend in good time—and we can

never do it too soon—the great truth that the spirit of the Gospel is essentially a spirit of sacrifice. There are a thousand circumstances in which we might obtain some slight sacrifice from these souls : in the holy time of Lent we may ask them to practise some daily mortifications ; in the month of Mary we may point out to them that the best nosegay to offer to the Blessed Virgin is a series of little acts of self-sacrifice ; if they are seeking some temporal favour, making a novena, perhaps, with this intention, we may hint to them that if mortification is joined to prayer the latter becomes much more potent ; above all, we may tell them that the best method of preparation for Holy Communion is to perform some act of penance during the days which precede this great act.

48. *Sacraments, Communions.*—We have just spoken of Holy Communion, and this, in fact, is the great means which gives their power and efficacy to all the others. “ If you eat not the flesh of the Son of God, you have no life in you.” To lead these souls to more frequent Communion, to teach them at the same time to prepare themselves well for their Communions—such is the twofold end to aim at. How many souls are there, whose conversion was sincere but not lasting, because they only communicated at distant intervals, and so were not strong enough to resist the attacks which followed their return to God ! How many others do hardly more than save appearances ! for though their external conduct is correct, yet they none the less remain immersed in mortal sin, save for the few moments which precede or follow their too infrequent Communions. If we can only get these beginners to approach the Holy Table with lively faith, and to make some effort to conquer themselves in their preparation, beside the absolutely requisite contrition, we need not be afraid to urge them to receive our Saviour frequently. And, once assured of that good-will, even though it is joined with much frailty, we have everything to hope for from their Communions. If Jesus enters often into their hearts,

little by little they will become more enlightened ; the horror of sin will grow within them ; their progress, slow at first, will end by becoming perceptible, and the action of Divine grace will be manifest. It was the ordinary practice of the majority of Christians during the first nine centuries of the Church to communicate every Sunday ;¹ shall we, perhaps, return to it ? For the souls which are as yet weak, though believing, weekly Communion would be the ideal, monthly Communion the minimum—a minimum that we should ask for only when we despair of getting more. Experience, in fact, proves that if by a monthly or even a fortnightly Communion we can preserve in the right dispositions those who are well inclined and have no great temptations to contend with, it is rare that this practice is sufficient when there is any deep-rooted vice to eradicate—rare that we gain through it any very notable progress in piety.

49. We said that we must teach them to communicate, and by this is meant accustoming them to make a serious preparation. The indirect preparation, the necessity of which must be pointed out, will consist chiefly in application to prayer and in the practice of self-denial, as was explained above. The proximate preparation for these beginners will best be made by the help of those prayers which are so well known, the acts before and after Communion, the best of which are by St. Alphonsus Liguori.

The fourth book of the *Imitation* will also prove of great service. Read on the eve of the Communion day, it will inspire feelings of devotion, and will put the heart in the best dispositions ; read after Communion, when the acts have been devoutly said, it will help to prolong the important exercise of the thanksgiving, and make it fruitful.

Beginners are often very negligent in performing this duty of thanksgiving. They should exert themselves to

¹ The author's arguments have been authoritatively confirmed of late, by the Holy Father's recent instructions on Daily Communion.—EDITOR.

pray ; they should recommend to God those who are dear to them, and make known to Him their own needs ; in a word, they should pour out their ardent supplication to their Divine Guest. It is the burning desire of Jesus to distribute His benefits with full hands, but too often the indifference of the communicant obliges our merciful Saviour to restrict His gifts.

SECTION II.—REMARKS ON THE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF BEGINNERS.

We divided the dwellers in the first mansion into three classes of beginners—*i.e.*, children and the newly converted, the habitués, and the lukewarm or tepid.

§ 1. *Tepid Souls.*

50. With regard to this last class—those souls, that is, who formerly served God with more fidelity, and have since fallen into a state bordering on indifference, they are much to be pitied, for they are indeed culpable. Above all, if they have known the sweetness and the consolations of devotion, we may without rash judgment affirm that they have since then been guilty of a terrible abuse of grace.

Lukewarmness or tepidity is generally supposed to be due to a contempt for little things, or, again, to the obstinate refusal to make the sacrifices that God requires of us. Thus, certain souls who are conscious of a call to a more perfect state turn a deaf ear to the voice of God ; others, who feel themselves urged in the depths of their souls to correspond better to the high vocation which they have embraced, recoil before the necessary sacrifices, and remain of their own choice in a sort of continual state of rebellion. This is the explanation of their heedlessness with regard to God, and of the little care that they have of their own spiritual interests.

Again, some authors give affection for venial sin as the

cause of lukewarmness, but in our opinion affection for venial sin constitutes rather than causes lukewarmness.

Affection for a venial sin is not the inclination for this sin : it is a disposition of the will, accepting of deliberate intent and in a permanent manner the responsibility for a fault which pleases us. It is to make up one's mind to remain in this sin, to commit it whenever an occasion presents itself. We say of *deliberate intent*—that is, with a thorough knowledge of the matter, with full understanding how wrong it is, and as a settled custom, or at least habitually ; for one may be ready to commit a sin for the moment, under the influence of certain circumstances (for instance, in moments of weariness, irritation, or great excitement) ; but these bad dispositions are *transitory*, and do not amount to what is commonly known as the affection for sin.

51. We shall make ourselves better understood if we show how and why a man can arrive at the state of falling habitually into venial sin without seeking to avoid it.

(1) It may be by ignorance¹ or thoughtlessness. They scarcely think of it, hardly notice that they cling to certain vices, or even regard the matter as of little importance. Thus, lies told in joke or with the object of doing some one a service give little trouble to most Christians ; they must be enlightened to a certain extent, and fashioned by grace, in order properly to understand that these very faults, just because they are faults, must be avoided with the greatest care. Here, then, there is rather a want of enlightenment than a really guilty affection for venial sin.

(2) In other cases there is not the same excuse of ignorance or thoughtlessness. Either the soul is more enlightened, or a more notable venial sin is in question. Then they understand well enough that they ought to correct themselves ; they have the desire to do so, but are,

¹ We, of course, refer to an involuntary ignorance. If the conscience has lost its delicacy by our own fault, by a long course of resistance to grace, the case would be different, for this culpable blindness would be the consequence of lukewarmness.

unhappily, too cowardly. They hesitate, prevaricate, and finally give up the struggle. This disposition is worse than the former one ; if it is only transitory, it may not be very dangerous, but if it persists, it will lead to the state which we are about to describe.

52. Persons of a sceptical and cynical turn of mind seem most exposed to fall into this sin. The devil makes great profit of this tendency in certain minds to blacken goodness, to ridicule virtue, mock at those who show zeal for their own progress and for the sanctification of their brethren, and to look only at the little side of good people, exaggerating their defects and depreciating their virtues. This obliquity of judgment comes from self-love. These banterers feel that they have little virtue themselves, so they get annoyed, and, not wishing to confess their inferiority, either to themselves or to others, they strive to belittle virtue itself and those who practise it, concealing their vexation under sneers and mockery. They do great harm to weak souls, who for fear of their sarcasms do not venture to do what is right, and so resist the inspirations of grace. Thus, they incur a terrible responsibility before God ; they do the devil's work, and are his unconscious instruments. To fall from this state into torpor and lukewarmness is but a short step.

53. If this condition of lukewarmness is but recent, the director will find it less difficult to cure, but after some time tepid souls become hardened, and it is then very difficult to amend them. We know St. Bernard's saying : " You will more easily see a great number of世俗s renounce vice and embrace virtue than one single religious pass from a tepid life to a fervent one."

The higher a soul has risen in the days of its fervour, the more deplorable will be its fall, and the more difficult will it be to raise it up again.

Such a soul had received, perhaps, exceptional graces ; God had, as it were, carried it in His fatherly arms ; He had removed all obstacles from its way, had enlightened it

wonderfully ; devotion seemed sweet to it, and virtue full of charms. It lost all these graces through its own fault. When it once more feels the desire to return to its state of fervour, it imagines that from the first signs of repentance all will be made easy as before, but it waits in vain for this action of the Divine mercy. Jesus has passed by ; once repulsed, He will return no more until He is entreated with urgent prayer, and until His visit is merited by generous efforts. Graces will not be given gratuitously, as formerly ; they must now be won with toil and labour, and the greater and more powerful they were, the more guilty, consequently, will have been their abuse, and so much the more painful and laborious must be the efforts necessary to win them back. If St. Paul, on the road to Damascus, had resisted the voice from heaven, God would not have smitten him to the earth again. The satellites whom Jesus overthrew in the Garden of Olives despised His grace, and Jesus gave them no new sign of His power. However, as nothing is impossible to grace, we must try to enlighten these poor people as to the danger of their condition, and to inspire them with the desire of amendment. If we can get them to pray more attentively, to live in a more supernatural way, to deny themselves in something, to make better preparation for Holy Communion, the flickering light of conscience will burn brightly once more, and their love of God become more sincere and more practical.

§ 2. *Belated Souls.*

54. As to those souls who have remained for long years in this condition without ever having been favoured with more conspicuous graces, the obstacle to their progress comes from their want of light and their inveterate prejudices. Accustomed as they are to their condition, they have ended by considering it quite satisfactory ; they are pleased with themselves, and it is not easy to make them esteem and desire a higher state of perfection. We may

try, however, to treat them as far as possible in the way described above, but it will be only by force of prayer and sacrifice that we shall obtain their amendment from God, and arrive at a satisfactory result.

§ 3. *Beginners—Children.*

55. Finally, there are the beginners—adults who have recently left a life of sin, or children who have been but lately born to grace. We have nothing special to say as to the first class. As to children, we must, in their case also, first make them understand all the value, all the advantage, of the Christian profession, and then accustom them to live such a life. A zealous priest, with his explanations of the Catechism, will give them wise advice as to the means of making their lives truly Christian. He will show them that the service of God consists chiefly in praying well, in offering Him all their actions, suffering patiently in submission to His will : in a word, in making the sacrifices that God demands of them—obedience, industry, and those little acts of mortification which are suitable to their tender age.

56. Let us give some examples of these practical lessons.

If we are explaining the chapter of the Catechism which treats of God, after having proved His existence and explained His nature, we should dwell on His infinite greatness, His tender goodness, His fatherly providence. From these truths we should draw a lesson as to His merciful designs in our regard, and as to the folly and ingratitude of those who rebel against Him, and pass their lives almost without a thought of Him. At the next lesson we should recapitulate in a few words the teaching given in the former one, and ask the children if they have thought over what they owe to God, and if they have done their duty towards Him better than before.

When treating of the soul, we should first explain its existence, nature, immortality, and so on, and then lay stress on the truth of that saying of Jesus Christ : *Quid*

prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur? (What doth it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?) A well-chosen anecdote will make the lesson more striking, such as that of the missioner who, observing that a stable-boy attended to his horse with a great deal of care and affection, got him to admit that he devoted two hours every day to the care of the horse, and only a few minutes to the care of his soul, whereupon he wittily remarked : “As you care so little for your soul and so much for your beast, if I belonged to you I would rather be your horse than your soul.” In the next lesson we should remind the children of this story, and ask them if they have profited by it, and not given more attention to their games or their dress than to their souls, and once more exhort them not to be so negligent.

When speaking of the sin of Adam, we should show them how immense was the goodness of God in sending His Son to redeem the world—*Sic Deus dilexit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret*—and how detestable the conduct of those who live in oblivion of so great a benefit. This is an opportunity (and we must never neglect one) of recalling all we owe to God, and inspiring in the children a horror of sin because it offends Him.

57. It is also very important to insist strongly, from the beginning of the course, on devotion to our Blessed Lady, and to have several stories to tell the children about her, in order to convince them more forcibly of the power of Mary’s intercession and her great goodness to us.

When the Catechism deals with the four last things, we must try to explain to them in as vivid a manner as possible the awful duration of that eternity which awaits us all. There are comparisons with regard to this point which have become, so to speak, classical. Such is that of a globe as large as this earth, which, if a bird once in a century just brushed with its wings as it passed, would be worn quite away almost before eternity had begun. Such, again, is

that of the ocean. We describe its vast extent, its length, breadth, and depth, and yet if one drop of water were taken out of it once in a thousand years, it would be emptied before a moment of eternity had, so to speak, passed. What a reward, what a chastisement ! What folly to commit mortal sin, what worse than folly to live in it ! This is another truth on which we must often dwell, because of its great importance. How good it would be if Christians were accustomed from their very childhood to this thought : " I am made for eternity, and so my life can have only one aim, to prepare for eternity ! "

The maxim of St. Aloysius : *Quid hoc ad aeternitatem ?* (What will this profit me for eternity ?) the story of the hermit whose good angel counted all his steps because everything he did was offered to God, the saying of St. Paul, " Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God " (1 Cor. x. 31), will furnish matter for excellent instructions.

58. Again, what precious lessons may be drawn from the story of our Blessed Lord's life and Passion ! How much can be said on the Son of God coming down from heaven and taking our nature upon Him, in order to suffer and to die for us, on the abjection and privations of the crib, the humility of Nazareth, the trials of the public ministry, the sufferings of Calvary ! " Come," we may add, " let us be patient as He was, and from now till the next class let no one be angry. If you have something disagreeable to suffer, instead of complaining, say to yourself, ' Can I not suffer something for God, Who has suffered so much for me ? ' "

We see that the motives on which we must lay stress in order to induce young souls to serve God with generosity may be reduced to two : we owe it to God and we owe it to ourselves ; it is our duty and it is our interest. This is what we must repeat over and over again—not two or three times only, but twenty or a hundred times, for these childish hearts are both easy to gain and easy to lose. The etching tool must be used repeatedly if we wish to engrave these

important lessons deeply in their hearts. Thus it will be easy to reiterate the same recommendations and urge the same motives under different forms when treating of grace, the Sacraments, sin, the Commandments, or prayer.

59. These instructions will be more efficacious still if we take care to repeat them in private after having taught them in our public catechizing. Thus, in confession we may make the children give an account of the efforts that they have made in the past month. "Have you profited by my advice the other day? Have you followed the counsels that I gave you in your last confession? Have you said your prayers better, been faithful in offering all your works to God, been more patient, known how to sacrifice your tastes and your own will to God, by being obedient, by working hard, and practising some little acts of self-denial?"

With such means we may hope to cure, as far as possible, that giddiness which is the great obstacle to goodness in young souls. For this same reason it will be well if he who conducts the prayers before the Catechism or the class should first remind the children of the duty of recollection and reverence.

60. An excellent device for overcoming the thoughtlessness of children, for making them solicitous about their souls, is a practice made familiar by the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*—*i.e.*, that of noting down every day the good works that have been performed. St. Ignatius, in his celebrated *Exercises*, advises beginners in virtue to make a table on which they may inscribe their faults, in order to help them in the important exercise of the particular examination, and thus aid them to correct their failings. The practice of which we speak is on the same principle. It is true that here we note down the good works, not the faults, but the result is the same.¹

61. The children who were faithful to this habit would

¹ At the end of this work will be found a model of such a table, drawn up for the use of children who have not yet made their first Communion.

gain much by it, and if besides this we can get them after their first Communion to receive the Blessed Sacrament frequently, the results will be both more immediate and more durable.

After a first Communion rightly made, the child who has once tasted the goodness of the Lord and the sweetness of the Bread of Life, will willingly return to the Holy Table. Sin has as yet made little impression on the heart, and if it is not allowed to take root we shall soon find that the young soul shows signs of faith that are indeed consoling. On the other hand, the longer we wait, the stronger the bad habits will have become, and the more difficult it will be to get them to contract good ones.

And here we may recall that maxim of Ovid, which is quoted in the *Imitation of Christ* :

*Principiis obsta : sero medicina paratur
Cum mala per longas invaluere moras.*

Alas ! we shall perhaps not have to wait very long. If Christian parents would only realize this truth, far from putting obstacles in the way of their children communicating frequently, they would encourage it. But many of them, even when the evil is done, hardly recognize the responsibility they have incurred by encouraging these young souls to wallow in sin, and thus preparing them for a pitiable existence.

62. We must, therefore, profit by that attraction for the Holy Eucharist which a first Communion, made after a careful preparation, will produce in the soul of the child. Feeling an earnest desire to return to the Holy Table, he will the more readily make the necessary efforts—efforts that it will be difficult to obtain of him later on if he has not acquired the habit early. A schoolboy seldom finds any great difficulty in communicating on Sunday, but for an apprentice or a young artisan or labourer the obstacles may be considerable ; it demands a much stronger and more energetic act of the will, and a much more ardent desire for the Holy Eucharist.

Evidently, this ardent desire for Holy Communion will not be found among souls who have been long absent from the Holy Table, especially if they have contracted bad habits, as there is too much reason to fear may be the case. We know of priests who, having tried to institute a monthly Communion among their young men, have had to give it up, because they did not find them in sufficiently good dispositions. They waited too long, we think, and also asked too little.

In fact, we ought to recognize that for a great number of Christians, and young men especially, a monthly Communion is quite insufficient. Their passions are often so strong, the conversations that they hear are so bad, the occasions of sin which they have to encounter are so numerous, that to resist for a whole month without having imbibed fresh strength from the Holy Eucharist is almost beyond their power. A Communion once a fortnight is much more efficacious than a Communion once a month, but a weekly Communion is far better still.

63. The First Communion, then, should be but a beginning, an initiation, an initial step in the Eucharistic way. Instead of this we are too apt to consider it as the end of the efforts made during the year's preparation, as an act which would lose its importance if it were repeated too often. Thus, instead of training children to live the Eucharistic life, to make this Divine nourishment a necessity of their existence, we very soon accustom them to do without Holy Communion, which has become an exceptional thing, and to regard it as quite natural to spend long months without approaching our Divine Lord.

But, people say, children are not serious enough. As if God did not know their weakness, and would exact a seriousness above their years. The Apostles in like manner thought that the little children were not worthy to approach our Saviour, and Jesus reproached them for it : *Sinite parvulos venire ad me* (Suffer the little children to come unto Me).

But, it is said again, is it not to be feared that these

children will stray from the right way later on ? And even if this were to happen, even if by reason of the shortness of time, during the few years that we are able to influence them, we should fail in making them so steadfast in virtue as to be invincible in the midst of the world and all its dangers, is that a reason for not trying our very best while we are able to do them good ? And even those who go astray may one day return to God, and then their past merits will come back to them, and their conversion will be more sincere and more profound.¹

- 64. We see, then, that solid instruction, education in Christian self-denial, and frequent recourse to the most holy Eucharist, are what we must chiefly insist on in the Christian training of children. It is impossible not to gain some fruit by this kind of grounding, for could God refuse to bless a zeal so full of solicitude ? Jesus Christ said to His Apostles : *Ego elegi vos et posui vos ut eatis, et fructum afferatis, et fructus vester maneat*—I have chosen you and have appointed you, that you should go and should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain (John xv. 16). Yes, the fruit will remain, the seed thus sown will germinate, and will go on ever growing ; it will be the beginning of a really serious and intelligent Christian life, and even if some who have been trained in this way should later on give up their religious practices, all will not be lost ; they will retain a lively remembrance of their early teaching, a more complete and enlightened idea of the Christian life, which will render their conversion later on much more easy and more consoling ; it will be the fire still glowing in the embers, which the lightest movement of the breath of grace will be sufficient to rekindle.

¹ A good way of combating the widespread prejudices with regard to, or rather against, Communion for children, over and above the sermons and catechizing on the subject, is to distribute amongst the children and to have read in their homes those excellent little books of Mother Mary Loyola, *A Simple Communion Book*, and *A Simple Confession Book*, and *Counsels on Holy Communion*, by Mgr. Séjur (C.T.S.).—EDITOR.

BOOK II

SECOND DEGREE—GOOD CHRISTIAN SOULS

CHAPTER I

PICTURE OF THE SOULS WHICH BELONG TO THE SECOND DEGREE

§ 1. The Doctrine of St. Teresa.

65. "Now let us consider," says St. Teresa, "which are the souls that enter the second mansion, and what they do there. . . . In this part of the castle are found souls which have begun to practise prayer;¹ they realize how important it is for them not to remain in the first mansion, and yet often lack determination to quit their present condition by avoiding occasions of sin, which is a very perilous state. However, it is a great grace that they should sometimes make good their escape from the vipers and poisonous creatures around them, and that they understand the need of avoiding them. . . .

"These souls hear our Lord calling them; for as they approach nearer to where His Majesty dwells He proves a loving neighbour, though they may still be engaged in the

¹ We must remember that the saint, when she wrote these words, had just said (*First Mansion*, chap. i.) that she understood by this not mental prayer only, but vocal prayer also, provided that it was accompanied by considerations and pious reflections. As we shall see, many good Christians, who have never practised mental prayer, properly so called, but who have known how to nourish and increase their faith by other means, must be placed in this second category.

amusements and business, the pleasures and vanities of this world. While in this state we are continually falling into sin and rising again, for the creatures amongst whom we dwell are so poisonous and vicious, and their company so dangerous, that it is almost impossible to avoid being tripped up by them" (*Second Mansion*, chap. i.).

When a soul has given itself with some earnestness to the service of God, when it has persevered for a considerable time, the light of grace grows brighter within it, faith develops, and conscience becomes more sensitive. It has doubtless not yet emerged from the purgative way, for the struggle is still sore; there must needs yet be long conflicts before the bad natural tendencies are weakened, especially when the soul has lived for a long time in an inferior state where these tendencies have grown strong. However, the soul has now arrived at a higher degree of the purgative way.

§ 2. *Distinctive Characteristics of this Second Mansion.*

66. *Practices of Devotion.*—Souls in the second mansion are those who, besides the ordinary prayers, have recourse, willingly, indeed, but without great fervour, to supererogatory practices of devotion, such as telling their beads and assisting at weekday Mass. We said "without great fervour." Sometimes, however, you will see them pray with all their hearts. Is it the breathings of Divine grace which move them? This recollected demeanour, these burning aspirations, these heart yearnings—are they the effects of a lively and sudden devotion? We must acknowledge that nature has a great share in all this. When we inquire the object of these fervent prayers, we shall find that it is some temporal favour earnestly desired, or to be saved from some trial, but never, or very seldom, purely spiritual blessings.

Such souls communicate often; not that they experience

much sweetness in their Communions, but they understand the greatness of the act, and they are readily induced to make a serious preparation for it. But if they are easily led to practise some devotional exercises they also very easily give them up again, and if they are not kept up to the mark become extremely negligent.

67. *Interior Dispositions*.—Although the souls who dwell in this mansion are for the most part preoccupied with natural cares, yet ideas connected with religion are more frequent with them than with those in the first mansion. However, even here they do not as a rule arise spontaneously. “They come,” says St. Teresa, “by discourses heard from good people, or from sermons, or by reading pious books, or many other ways which are well known, such as by sickness and adversity; and also He causes certain truths to shine into the soul in times of prayer, for however remiss this prayer may be, yet God esteems it greatly.”

It is, so to speak, a *state of intermittent piety*. We say piety because the soul desires not only to correct its faults but also to progress in virtue; but these desires are intermittent. It experiences them, for instance, at confession or Holy Communion, or when hearing a sermon; in a word, on the various occasions mentioned by St. Teresa; but apart from this, the desire for progress is seldom manifested. The soul is also more determined to remain faithful to God. Such souls, however, are in reality far less constant in this respect than one would imagine, or than they themselves suppose, for they are often ignorant of their own weakness.

68. *External Conduct*.—Christian self-denial is beginning to appear. From time to time the soul makes an effort to overcome itself, and is even capable of serious acts of mortification, but without much perseverance. Grave sins are rare, except when some dangerous occasion presents itself, for then these souls which are good but frail soon succumb. Another exception, in the case of souls who have already had acquaintance with the evil, is any violent

temptation against holy purity, for then these imperfectly mortified souls are not strong enough to overcome them.

In the first mansion the soul still had but little horror of venial sins. It too easily committed deliberate venial sins even without any violent excitement of the passions. "What I am doing is not right, but it does not signify." In the second mansion the soul avoids these small sins with more care; but when it is a case of self-interest, when the passions are aroused, when susceptibility, self-love, vanity, or sensuality assail it, or, again, when it is afraid of some worry or annoyance, it sins with open eyes and full consent. "After all," it says to itself, "it is not so very serious." It is true that when the occasion is past and the passions appeased, it sincerely regrets having yielded, but a relapse is still much to be feared. These persons are not attached to their faults, but they have not really at heart the work of struggling against them all.

Christians who have arrived at this degree of the spiritual life have, then, the appearances of piety without any true devotion. As we have just said, they sometimes fall into lamentable errors, and even from time to time indulge in most unedifying language. For these reasons they are sometimes very severely criticized, they are taxed with hypocrisy and insincerity, while, as a matter of fact, their faith is sincere in the main, and their good dispositions are real. A director must beware of such severe judgments, and remember that these souls are unstable but not hypocritical.

It is likewise on account of their inconstancy, the rapid alternations of their good and evil moments, the mixture of religious sentiments and a worldly spirit which is found in them—it is on account of all this that certain Christians do not give God's cause the support that one would expect of them. We shall not change them by invectives or bitter reproaches; it is rather by aiding them to lead a more devout life that we shall be able to inspire them with the self-forgetfulness and devotion of the true soldiers of God.

69. Such are the general characteristics of this second mansion. There are from time to time real aspirations after spiritual progress, but virtue still seems a very difficult thing to acquire, and, as a rule, there are still weary struggles to be endured.

Some souls there are, however, who have not advanced beyond this degree, and yet they do not undergo any violent assaults. They must be reckoned as belonging to the second mansion because they have not that intense longing after virtue which is felt by more advanced souls, or those more abundant lights and that ardent faith which are the characteristic signs of the illuminative way. A great number of Christians are in this state. Without having frequented the Sacraments much, or cultivated mental prayer, they are yet firmly established in goodness. They keep themselves apart from the dangers of the world, and are also preserved from its perils by their horror of the wicked and even of the worldly. On the other hand, the good education which they have received, the habitual intercourse with virtuous people, the profit that they have derived from sermons and the other external aids of religion, their fidelity to the duties of their state of life—all this has developed their good dispositions. We notice in them a supernatural life of faith, a sincere love of the Church, and a true zeal for her interests. Some of them are valuable auxiliaries for the priest, for they are greatly attached to God's cause, and they bring to the service of religion natural qualities which are sometimes remarkable and great self-devotion. These souls only need a more complete spiritual training to make great progress in the spiritual life.

70. Finally, it appears to us that certain children and young men, and, above all, numbers of young girls, should be ranked among the inhabitants of the second mansion, though they have no great conflicts to endure. These are persons whose failings are not greatly developed, and who, besides, have been preserved from the infections of vice.

Their growing piety does not encounter great obstacles, and if their conduct is satisfactory they advance gradually towards the third mansion, which is that of true piety. In fervent parishes and in well-managed colleges and boarding-schools, and even in primary schools where Holy Communion occupies its right place, such souls are numerous, and give good grounds for hope to the priest's heart.

§ 3. *How the Souls in this Second Degree may Relapse or become Stationary.*

71. The condition of the souls which, according to St. Teresa's teaching, we have placed in the second mansion, is not, indeed, a state of high perfection, but yet it supposes that a certain part of the way has been traversed, and that the soul has received a goodly number of graces. Among these graces we have mentioned a truly Christian education, or the good influence of virtuous surroundings. Perhaps these souls have practised their duty faithfully, and have found in this fidelity, if not very great sensible consolations, at least that satisfaction in duty well done which strengthens good dispositions and facilitates perseverance.

But we see that certain souls who have reached this point fall back again miserably. Others, again, remain there without proceeding further, while some advance and rise insensibly to a higher degree of perfection. The difference between them depends chiefly on the manner in which they endure the trials which Divine Providence sends them.

72. The first of these trials is the taking away of those helps which they had enjoyed, and which specially nourished their piety. These souls, for instance, were surrounded by an extremely religious family, or were in a college where everything encouraged them to do right, and now, all of a sudden, they are removed from these favourable conditions, and thrown into the midst of a very

different set of people, where they have much less help and are exposed to indifference, to worldliness, and often to vicious examples. If they resist, as is their duty, they become more constant and more generous, and the trial will only have served to purify their virtue and increase their merits, which was the end for which it was sent by Divine Providence. But this trial is a very dangerous one for souls that are not fundamentally pious. Many succumb to it ; worldly anxieties, the worries and cares of an often harassing life, material considerations, absorb all the attention of these poor souls ; all care for their sanctification dies away, and they relapse into indifference and tepidity. They give up the Sacraments, or only receive them at long intervals ; they neglect their prayers, and this brings about a diminution in the graces that they receive, and at the same time venial sins multiply and produce the most fatal results.

"The ruin of souls," says Père Lallement,¹ "comes from the multiplication of venial sins, which cause the diminution of Divine lights and inspirations, of interior graces and consolations, and of the fervour and courage necessary to resist the attacks of the enemy. Hence follow blindness, weakness, frequent lapses, habits of wrong-doing, insensibility, because when once a man has conceived the affection, he sins without noticing his sin."

This great evil is easier to prevent than to cure. It is therefore important to warn souls of the dangers they will run when deprived of the means of salvation which God is then lavishing upon them. We thus inspire in their hearts a salutary fear, induce them to pray more, to recommend their future life to God, and to form serious resolutions for

¹ *Doctrine Spirituelle*, 3^o Principe, chap. ii., p. 132 (Paris, Lecoffre, 1 fr. 25). Père Lallement, whose name will recur more than once in the course of this work, was one of the most celebrated religious of the Society of Jesus. He was favoured during life with extraordinary gifts, and died at Bourges in the odour of sanctity, April 5, 1635. Pères Surin, Nouet, Rigoleuc, and the Venerable P. Maunoir, were among his disciples.

the hour of danger. The more they are on their guard, the greater will be the likelihood of victory. At the critical moment we must take care to surround them with a yet greater solicitude ; and when this is impossible, to recommend them earnestly to God, who can, when He so wills, bring good out of evil, and Who sometimes grants unexpected helps to these poor souls.

73. Again, the relapse of these souls comes frequently from discouragement. They are harassed by temptations which are often very formidable, and to which they too often succumb, and thus they end by losing all hope of amendment ; they have not enough fear of God's justice, and especially not enough confidence in His unwearied mercy. Whatever their faults and failings, so long as they are not discouraged, so long as they continue to pray and to struggle, their faith, their desire to do better, cannot weaken ;¹ but as soon as the devil (for this is his work) has succeeded in communicating to them some part of his infernal despair, their dispositions are no longer the same. It is not the frequency of their falls alone which brings about this miserable condition of soul. Wounded self-love, through the vexation which it produces, leads to the same result ; and thus come about those effects just described by Père Lallemant : the weakening of good dispositions, blindness, frequent falls, and insensibility.

Thus it is that these Christians, after making some progress in virtue, fall back again if they are not capable of profiting by the various trials which they meet with.

74. Many others remain always stationary. The time of trial does not find them very unfaithful, but neither does

¹ " Certain falls into mortal sin do not prevent the soul from making progress in devotion, provided that it has no design of remaining immersed therein, and does not sink down into the sleep of sin. Although the soul loses the grace of devotion on thus falling, yet it recovers it at the first real contrition that it experiences for its sin, even, as I said, when it has not been steeped in this misfortune for a length of time" (St. François de Sales, *Letter to a Lady*, edition Briday, vi., 404).

it result in any great acts of virtue. The aim of the Divine wisdom in sending them these trials is to give them the opportunity of exercising their faith, their confidence, and their love ; unhappily, however, their efforts are weak and, above all, intermittent. One day they are all diligence, the next they are distracted and nerveless ; occasionally they give proofs of courage and generosity, but these fervent days are the exception rather than the rule. Want of thought, heedlessness, yielding to circumstances, have far too much part in their lives ; they make some show of fight against their failings, but without bringing enough vigour or perseverance to the combat. These transitory efforts, this sort of half-generosity, the few victories that they gain, keep them from falling lower, but they are not sufficient to raise them higher.

75. If they are obliged by their state of life to tend towards perfection, this disposition is exceedingly dangerous for them, for it supposes a great abuse of grace. These are the people that Père Lallemant had in view when he said : " There are religious who refuse nothing to their senses. If they are cold, they warm themselves ; if hungry, they eat ; if some amusement suggests itself, they take it unhesitatingly ; they are always resolved to please themselves, and have hardly any practical knowledge of what mortification is. They acquit themselves of their spiritual functions for form's sake, without any heart, without unction, and without fruit. . . . They examine their consciences in an extremely superficial manner. Steeped thus in oblivion of their own hearts, they are engrossed with an infinite variety of objects that are constantly occupying their minds, and they are, as it were, intoxicated and carried out of themselves by the bustle and confusion of external affairs. These religious may often be in greater danger than seculars." Assuredly, such people in no way respond to God's designs upon them, and they have hardly profited by, and often greatly abused, the graces which have been offered them.

76. Others remain stationary without being very blame-worthy ; these are less favoured Christians of whom God does not seem to demand a lofty degree of perfection. It may happen that without mounting higher, while still dwelling in this second mansion, they arrive at a state which is all but satisfactory and not without merit. Their faith is lively, and even continues to get clearer and brighter ; their resolution to be faithful to God is sincere ; their sentiments are praiseworthy ; but their love always remains weak, and their spirit of mortification is very imperfect. Often, however, after they have remained a long time in this state, we find them suddenly making a generous start, and advancing with firm steps on the way of perfection. It is, in fact, the most common course for Divine Providence to leave these souls for a more or less lengthy period in this intermediate state of semi-piety, or fidelity without great fervour. Then, when God deems them ripe for new graces, He metes out to them some favourable circumstance of such a nature as to give them special encouragement in their progress ; a fervent retreat, for instance, a change of situation which detaches them from the hindrances of a worldly or over-busy life. Again, it may be friendship and intercourse with devout and holy people, or meeting with a zealous director ; or sometimes a trial, a bereavement, or some great sorrow which is borne courageously and faithfully. In these various circumstances grace works powerfully in their souls, which are already well disposed ; it enlightens their minds and enkindles their hearts. Then the supernatural virtues, the germs of which are already within them, are practised and grow stronger, and these Christians enter upon a new life of faith and true piety.

CHAPTER II

DIRECTION OF THE SOULS OF THE SECOND DEGREE

SECTION I.—SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION.

77. It is at this point of the spiritual life that souls begin, as a rule, to feel the need of direction ; at least, it becomes more easy to elicit from them those intimate outpourings of the heart which permit the director to know them better, and thus to guide them more surely on the way of perfection.

This direction should be paternal, firm, supernatural, and practical.

§ 1. Direction should be Paternal.

78. It is necessary that the directed (especially if they have not yet much zeal for advancement) should feel that an interest is taken in them, and that out of love for their souls their progress in virtue is earnestly desired. “ Be sure,” says Père Lallemant, “ that you will have done more for their perfection if you have gained their hearts than if you have given them the best possible instructions without doing so. In this way you will compel them to feel a reciprocal affection for you, and a filial confidence which will cause them to open their whole hearts to you, and to confide all their little interests into your hands.”

To make himself all things to all men, after St. Paul’s example, is the first duty of a director : *Omnia omnibus factus sum, ut omnes facerem salvos* (1 Cor. ix. 22). We find in this great Apostle a perfect model of what the priest ought to be in his dealings with souls. He reminds the faithful unceasingly—and we know with what conviction he speaks—of the fundamental maxims of the Gospel, renunciation, the dying to self in order to live only to God, the struggle

with the old man, and perfect detachment ; but how well he knows how to make these austere maxims acceptable by dint of kindness and a tender and holy affection ! In almost every page of his epistles we find these accents of a truly fatherly tenderness towards his children.

We see how he thanks God for the graces which are given them in Jesus Christ ;¹ how great is his solicitude for all their needs, both temporal and spiritual ; how he takes his share in all that they feel—joys and sorrows, anxieties and hopes—himself practising most admirably that which he recommends so forcibly to others : *Gaudere cum gaudentibus, flere cum flentibus.*² How many times he assures them, confirming it even with an oath, that without ceasing he makes commemoration of them,³ always in his prayers, remembering them by night and day,⁴ longing greatly to see them.⁵ He says to the Corinthians : *In cordibus nostris estis, ad commoriendum et ad convivendum*⁶ (You are in our hearts, to die together, and to live together). He often begs for the help of their prayers.⁷ He energetically protests that he belongs to them absolutely : *Omnia vestra sunt, sive Paulus,*⁸ etc. ; that he is altogether a debtor to them : *Græcis ac Barbaris, sapientibus et insipientibus debitor sum ;*⁹ that he desires only one thing, and that is to spend himself in their service : *Ego autem libentissime impendam, et superimpendar ipse pro animabus vestris* ; and yet, he adds with a tone of gentle reproach : “The more I love you, the less I am loved.”¹⁰

He rejoices to suffer for them : *Nunc gaudeo in passionibus pro vobis.*¹¹ He refers all that he experiences—afflictions, consolations, encouragement—to the profit of their souls.¹² For their sakes he consents to see the postponement of the object of his most ardent desire, the eternal possession of God, union with Christ : *Desiderium habens dissolvi et esse*

¹ 1 Cor. i. 4; 2 Cor. iii. 2; 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20, etc.

² Rom. xii. 15.

³ Rom. i. 9.

⁴ Passim.

⁵ Rom. xv. 23; 1 Thess. ii. 17, 18; iii. 10.

⁶ 2 Cor. vii. 3.

⁷ Rom. xv. 30, etc.

⁸ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

⁹ Rom. i. 14.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. xii. 15.

¹¹ Col. i. 24.

¹² 2 Cor. i. 6.

*cum Christo . . . permanere autem in carne necessarium propter vos.*¹ He delights in affectionately reminding them of all that he has done for them, in repeating to them all that their conversion has cost him.² He says to the Thessalonians : “ Whereas we might have been burdensome to you, as the Apostles of Christ ; but we became little ones in the midst of you, as if a nurse should cherish her children. So desirous of you, we would gladly impart unto you, not only the Gospel of God, but also our own souls, because you were become most dear unto us.”³

“ What is my hope and my joy and my crown of glory ? Is it not you who are this before our Lord Jesus Christ, and will be so again at the day of His coming ? Yes, you are my glory and my joy.” “ A father and a mother,” says St. John Chrysostom, “ if they united their love in one, could say nothing more tender than this.” It is with the same accent of fatherly tenderness that he writes to the Corinthians : “ If I make you sorrowful, who is he then that can make me glad ?”⁴

St. Paul often addresses the most graceful words to the faithful,⁵ especially when he wishes to win something from them,⁶ or to make some reproof acceptable to them.⁷ In this last case, when he is compelled to reprove and to blame, his reproaches are as affectionate as they are touching. “ Brethren,” he writes to the Galatians,⁸ “ I beseech you : you have not injured me at all. You know how, through infirmity of my flesh, I preached the Gospel to you heretofore ; and your temptation in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected : but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. . . . I bear you witness that, if it could be done, you would have plucked out your own eyes and would have given them to me. Am I then become your enemy, because I tell you the truth ? . . . My little children, of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in

¹ Phil. i. 23, 24.

² Acts xx. 34; 1 Cor. iv. 12; 2 Thess. iii. 8.

³ 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

⁴ 2 Cor. ii. 1.

⁵ Rom. i. 8; 1 Cor. i. 5; 1 Thess. i. 3; iii. 6.

⁶ Philem. 7.

⁷ Rom. xv. 14.

⁸ Gal. iv. 12-20.

you, I would willingly be present with you now, and change my voice, because I am ashamed for you." He ends his admonitions by words of encouragement and hope : "I have confidence in you in the Lord : that you will not be of another mind than I am."¹

If he is sometimes compelled by circumstances to adopt a severer tone (*e.g.*, 1 Cor. v.), he explains himself later on, and protests that his action has been dictated solely by his affection for them. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears : not that you should be made sorrowful ; but that you should know the charity that I have more abundantly towards you."² And he returns to the subject further on, as if he feared that they would feel some ill-will towards him, and excuses himself once more : "For although I made you sorrowful by my epistle, I do not repent ; and if I did repent, seeing that the same epistle (although but for a time) did make you sorrowful : now I am glad : not because you were made sorrowful ; but because you were made sorrowful unto penance. . . . And if I have boasted anything to Titus of you, I have not been put to shame, but as we have spoken all things to you in truth, so also our boasting to him is found to be truth [*gloriatio nostra . . . veritas facta est*]. . . . I rejoice that in all things I have confidence in you."³

79. It is not only in St. Paul, it is in all the saints whose lives we know, and, above all, in those who were called in a special manner to exercise the ministry of direction, that we remark this same spirit of gentleness, whole-hearted devotion, supernatural affection, and fatherly tenderness. Thus was it with St. Philip Neri, St. Francis of Sales, St. Vincent of Paul, St. Alphonsus Liguori, the Blessed Curé d'Ars, etc. They, too, followed the maxim of the Gospel in all things ; they, too, took every possible pains to impress on souls the great principles of renunciation, abnegation, and death unto self ; but they knew well how to temper, after our Lord's example, the apparent bitter-

¹ Gal: v. 10.

² 2 Cor. ii. 4.

³ 2 Cor. vii. 8-16.

ness of these precepts by the sweet and loving way in which they presented them. Since a wise direction must tend almost constantly to teach souls the practice of self-sacrifice, and to lead them to die to self in order to live to God—*Jam non sibi vivant, sed ei, qui pro ipsis mortuus est* (2 Cor. v. 15)—it is clear that the severity of the principles needs to be sweetened by the gentleness of the manner of administering them ; for we shall find that kindness and persuasiveness are much more apt to lead souls to sacrifice and to detachment than harsh rebukes and admonitions.

80. "Let them find in you," says St. Vincent Ferrier, "a father full of compassion for his children, who is grieved when they sin, or are suffering from some grievous sickness, or are fallen into a deep pit, and who does his very best to rescue them from all these dangers. Or, rather, have the heart of a mother, who caresses her children, rejoices at their progress, and at the glories of paradise which she anticipates for them" (*Of the Spiritual Life*, Book II., chap. x.).

This advice, it is true, is addressed to preachers, but the great wonder-worker adds immediately afterwards : "Act in the same way in confession ; whether you have gently to encourage cowardly souls, or whether to frighten those who are hardened in sin, show to all the bowels of a tender charity, in order that the sinner may feel that this charity ever inspires your words. For this reason, if you have any reprimand to make, see that you always say something kind and affectionate first."

81. The following story from the life of St. Vincent of Paul gives us at once an example and a eulogium of this beautiful virtue of gentleness. Having been informed that one of his missionaries treated his people with some harshness, St. Vincent wrote to him to exhort him to be more gentle, but "without showing the slightest want of consideration for his person, or telling him that he had received information of his defect." He began by giving him news of the missions and of the good that they were doing. Then, speaking more particularly of the labours of

one of his priests and the marvellous successes that he achieved, the saint went on : " They attribute this happy success to the care that he takes to win over these poor people by gentleness and kindness ; and this has made me resolve to recommend more than ever to our Society to practise these virtues in still greater perfection. If God has blessed our first missions, it has been observed that this was owing to our having acted with kindness, humility, and sincerity towards all classes ; and if He has made any use of the most wretched among us in the conversion of various heretics, these converts have acknowledged that it was due to the patience and cordiality which he displayed. Even the galley-slaves among whom I lived were not to be won in any other fashion, and when I chanced to speak severely I spoilt everything. But, on the other hand, when I praised their resignation and compassionated their sufferings ; when I told them how happy they were to have their purgatory in this world ; when I kissed their chains, sympathized with their sorrows, and commiserated them on their afflictions, it was then that they listened to me, that they gave glory to God, and allowed themselves to be converted. I beg you, sir, to help me to thank God for this, and to ask Him to deign to cause all missionaries to treat their neighbour kindly, humbly, and charitably, both in public and private, even the sinful and the callous, without ever using invectives or reproaches or harsh remarks about anyone. I do not doubt, sir, that you on your part try to avoid this way of treating souls, which rather tends to embitter and repel than to attract them. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal sweetness of men and angels, and it is by this same virtue that we ought to try to go to Him, while leading others there also."

82. The disciples of St. Alphonsus Liguori asked him one day what he considered the most important rule for the direction of souls. " I have no doubt whatever as to that," he replied : " the true characteristic of direction, and that which is most in conformity to the spirit of God and of the

Gospel, is gentleness. Did not God show His mercy to Adam when he fell ? and was it not our Lord Who said, ' Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart ' ? Did He not bear patiently with the defects of His Apostles, not excepting even Judas ? " And the Saint added : " Besides, consider for yourselves what good the Jansenists have done in France by representing God as a tyrant."

Gentleness, in fact, was the distinctive feature of St. Alphonsus' direction through his whole life. He believed that souls are better established by gentleness than severity, just as they are drawn more surely to God by making them love rather than fear Him. He would say : " Conversions based on fear alone are not lasting, and where love has failed terror would never win the day." " When some horrid monster covered with scales rises up before you," he used to say to his companions, " and you are terror-stricken, like the young Tobias, then hand him over to me, that from his gall I may make an offering to Our Lord Jesus Christ."

And the secret on which he counted in order to win the sinner was, again, only gentleness. He received him kindly, with a truly paternal welcome, as that one dear sheep for whose sake the Shepherd must leave the other ninety-and-nine. He was moved at his misery, showed the most touching compassion for him, and without one hard word or wounding remark he made it easy for him to unburden his soul, softening by his discreet questions the bitterness of his avowals.

83. But, you will say, if we act with such great kindness and gentleness, is there not a risk of encouraging the egotism of certain souls who are greedy to attract all the solicitude and to absorb all the attention of their spiritual father ? Is it not, on the contrary, necessary to maintain a certain reserve ?

No doubt ; but this necessary reserve does not exclude either kindness or interest. Let us only ensure that these souls always feel that we are animated by those supernatural

and high motives which ought to guide us, that they see clearly that it is the love of God alone which inspires us, and that our feelings of paternal affection and devotion are joined with a perfect personal detachment. In this way, we shall not have to be afraid of those exaggerations, those too natural sentiments of tenderness, which would spoil the fruits of our direction, and, on the other hand, those whom we direct will always preserve a true respect for us, their filial confidence will never degenerate into unbecoming familiarity.

Yes, we must avoid all softness and exaggerated tenderness, but we must also show great kindness and affability, which will put them completely at their ease. Listen to the reproaches made by the Venerable Father Libermann to a director of a seminary : “ I think that you really neglect your penitents a little too much on account of your business. You do not let them see you as much as they sometimes need, and when they come outside the appointed quarter of an hour, if you are just then at work, it must often happen that you get rid of them quickly and without giving them the consolations they desire ; and this sometimes even with a certain roughness, because your mind is occupied, and you want to finish what you have in hand. . . . Never have the appearance of a man in a hurry ; only when we see that everything is settled we send them away in peace. Be always very gentle, but without ever flattering them or giving them sensible marks of affection ” (*Letter dated February 24, 1838*).

§ 2. *Direction ought to be Firm.*

84. The kindness of the director must not degenerate into weakness ; a director who was wanting in firmness would succeed hardly better than one who lacked gentleness. Souls cannot, as a matter of fact, make any progress, except on the condition that they struggle incessantly

against nature. They do not always resign themselves to do this ; they seek for pretexts or excuses, and are happy if they can get our approval for their acts of resistance or of cowardice. It is hard to contradict them ; it costs us something to be always demanding sacrifices and administering reproofs, but yet we find that the human will, recoiling before the necessary efforts, refusing to accomplish acts of self-sacrifice which seem too painful, really needs to be forced onwards towards the goal with vigour and sometimes even with severity. In these cases the fear of being reproached produces the effects which encouragement failed to accomplish. If the director who chides them gives them every proof in other ways of his paternal devotion ; if it is evident that he is not yielding to impatience or vexation ; if, as we showed in the case of St. Paul, he tempers the bitterness of his reproofs by subsequent kindness, his direction cannot fail to bring forth good fruit. But it is pleasanter and more attractive to be conciliatory, and that is why we easily persuade ourselves that it is also wiser ; that we shall in this way avoid driving away the weak and quenching the still smoking flax. Unhappily, when we act thus, it is grace that we are quenching ; it is the Holy Spirit that we are driving away. We get a reputation for kindness and gentleness to which we cling in too human a way, and thus we do not forward the true interests of souls.

85. Even when a person troubles himself about trifles and gives way to vain scruples, we must not think that it is only necessary to reassure him, and to overcome all his fears and remorse. Side by side with these groundless agonies which are caused by his imagination, and which the devil augments, there is room for the warnings of the Holy Ghost. For the scrupulous, far from being blameless, generally have failings which need to be vigorously combated. It would be very deleterious to them were we not to teach them to distinguish between the warnings of grace and the foolish fears of their perverted judgment, urging them to listen to the former as much as they despise the latter.

A prudent and zealous guide will seize the opportunity given him by such scruples to teach the soul to know itself. He will show it that if it is thrown into a state of discouragement by recognizing the existence of some defect, this shows that it is still under the dominion of self-love. It is galled to find itself more wretched than it had thought, and so it yields to vexation, and lacks courage to continue the struggle. It ought, on the contrary, to accept thankfully these glimmerings which God vouchsafes to it, in order to reveal the abyss of misery within. They are as yet but feeble glimmerings, for God does not show us our heart in its full ugliness all at once. He reveals our true nature to us by degrees, increasing His light in proportion as we profit by it. Happy is he who finds a guide who desires to encourage this illuminating action of grace—a guide who does not fear to humiliate his penitent, and who takes care at the same time to support him in the war to the death which he has to wage against his corrupted nature.

§ 3. *How Direction must be altogether Supernatural.*

86. Kind and firm—such, then, must be the character of our direction. *Fortiter et suaviter.* It is thus that the eternal Wisdom proceeds, and this union of strength and sweetness is, as it were, the seal of the Divine operation, the sign of a zeal inspired by the Holy Ghost. Direction will not fail to have this double quality if the spiritual father *forgets himself* in his relations with his ghostly children, and has no other aim than the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. It is the mission of the angel-guardian to reveal the Divine will to the soul that he protects, and he is in this way a perfect model for all those who have the duty of enlightening and guiding their brethren. With what delicacy, what self-forgetfulness does this zealous and prudent messenger fulfil his mission ! He in no wise changes the nature of the inspiration that he has to communicate ; he does not blend his own will with the

Divine will ; he effaces himself, and directs the attention of his charge, not to himself, but to his Divine Master ; he seems to approach that soul with no other motive than that of showing him by his own example how the creature should annihilate himself in the presence of God.

The human messengers to whom God gives the charge of making known His Divine will, ought to imitate the disinterestedness of the angel-guardian. If they are too self-confident, rely too much upon their own lights, and remain too much attached to their own will, they impose their private opinions upon the souls committed to them, and thus substitute their own action for the Divine action, their judgment for the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. They thus put themselves in God's place, and usurp His rights, and this cannot but be detrimental to the souls both of the directed and the director.

87. The director has indeed a beautiful mission, and if only we were fully persuaded of this, who would regret the time consecrated to enlightening souls and encouraging their progress in the way of Divine love ? Is not each soul a temple where God the Holy Ghost makes His habitation ? And can we take too much pains on the decoration and embellishment of these temples of God ? Does not He derive more glory from these spiritual temples than from the material buildings consecrated to His worship ? In the eyes of the angels and saints he does much for the Divine honour who helps one soul to advance in faith and charity. During all eternity this sanctified soul will render to the Holy Trinity an ever more worthy homage, and the glory of God will thus be eternally augmented. If these thoughts are always before the priest's eyes, they will prove a powerful incentive to his zeal. The confessor should say, when each new penitent presents himself : " This soul is sent to me by God that I may do him some good, and he must not leave me without taking away with him some spiritual fruit." We should thus guard against routine, and acquit ourselves more worthily of our sublime ministry.

88. When we said that direction must be paternal, we did not mean that the director should trouble himself about all his penitent's concerns. There are some people who can do nothing by themselves, and who would like their director to make up their minds for them in all their business, even in temporal affairs ; but such a course would lead to great abuses. When a matter of this kind has to be decided, it is the person whose duty it is to make the decision who will receive grace and light from God, and not the director. He should simply direct—that is to say, distinguish the reasons for acting—prevent the penitent from yielding to purely human motives and neglecting to look at the matter from a Christian point of view ; above all, he must hinder him from making decisions which would be hurtful to his spiritual interests. This is his part, and he must confine himself to it, under peril of losing his authority, or even sometimes of abusing it to the detriment of his own conscience.

§ 4. Direction ought to be Practical.

89. The first abuse to be pointed out under this head is that after the confession the confessor too often limits himself to a vague exhortation made in a kind of formal and monotonous manner, so that the penitent thinks, "When my confessor gives me advice, he speaks as if he was preaching." It is with good reason that preachers are recommended to cultivate a natural delivery ; he should aim, as Pascal says, at being, not an orator, but a man, and he will in this way get people to share his convictions more effectually. But this precept is of even greater importance in the confessional ; here he should cultivate a simple and natural delivery, speaking, not preaching, like a man, not a rhetorician.

90. It is also necessary to suit our counsels to these whom we address. Even when we have some common theme, we must vary its application according to the needs of each one ; there is so much diversity in souls.

The method that we have already described of ascertaining how the penitent has carried out the advice previously given him, the questions that we may put during our exhortation as to whether he feels any special difficulty, or, on the other hand, some good inspirations, if he has not acted under certain circumstances in such and such a way, and so on ; this must necessarily render our direction more natural and more suited to the individual needs.

This method will be still more efficacious if, instead of always changing the subject-matter of our exhortation, we take care to lay stress, several times running, on some specially important and practical subject. This subject, which may be, for instance, some fundamental virtue, some exercise of piety, or some salutary devotion, may be presented successively under different aspects. We should show on diverse occasions the various motives which urge us to apply ourselves to the virtue or devotion in question, and point out, one after the other, the different devices which may help us to exercise it, and make its practice one of our daily habits. Thus, for instance, at the beginning of a new year we may insist on the good employment of time—during Lent, on the practice of penance and mortification ; during the month of Mary, on devotion to our Lady ; during October, on the method and art of prayer ; during November, on the thought of the four last things, and the need of working for eternity, etc.

There are many remarks to be made, many counsels to be given on each of these points. We may also give as a penance certain chapters of the *Imitation*, to be read attentively, which will oblige the penitent to dwell again on the same considerations, and help to emphasize the director's advice. A passing recommendation is soon forgotten, and he who allows his penitents to dissipate their efforts and flit from practice to practice, without tarrying at any one of them, will obtain but little fruit ; while by insisting on certain truths in the way we have described, and inducing them to undertake the work of their sanctification in an

orderly sequence, and to apply themselves with perseverance to the most important points of the spiritual life, we shall procure much better results, and shall compel them, so to speak, to contract habits of solid virtue.

91. It is clear that we must know a person thoroughly before we can render him any real service, and this knowledge is not attained all at once. There are people, however, whom we see but seldom, or even for the first time, who immediately, by the way in which they make their confession, by the deep and enlightened faith of which they give proof, show that they are capable of being trained in perfection. We must take the more care not to neglect them, as we have so few opportunities of doing them good. A zealous director, from the very qualities which he remarks in them, takes occasion to urge them to give themselves up more generously to the service of God ; He congratulates them on their good dispositions, but shows them that since they have been more favoured by Divine grace, so it is their duty not to tarry on such a good course, but to endeavour with all their power to lead a life in strict conformity to the precepts of the Gospel.

§ 5. Duties of Persons under Direction towards their Spiritual Father.

92. If spiritual direction does not always produce the fruits that one might hope, the fault is often less that of the confessor than of the penitents.¹ What, then, are the dispositions necessary for those under direction ?

¹ "It would be unjust," says M. Chaumont, "to attribute to the director the languid and feeble state for which the penitent is alone responsible. . . . We know that Jesus Himself, Who did so much good to the Samaritan woman and to so many other foreigners, could do nothing for His own countrymen, as the Gospel tells us. . . . Besides the art of spiritual direction, which is less rare nowadays than it was, there is another art, less striking, no doubt, but nevertheless of great importance, and that is the art of submitting to direction."

(1) A great spirit of faith. If they knew the gift of God, and Who it is that speaks to them by the mouth of the priest—*Si scires donum Dei, et quis est qui loquitur tecum*—they would always listen with respect and docility to their director's words, and their fervent prayers would draw down on the representative, the interpreter of God, more abundant lights for the direction of their souls.

(2) The spirit of humility, which prevents them from dreading as a great misfortune, rebuffs, reproaches, or marks of indifference.

(3) The spirit of simplicity, which gives the penitent straightforwardness and great openness of heart. The more they become like children, the more will the confessor feel he is their father ; their confidence will increase his solicitude and devotion.

(4) The spirit of abnegation, thanks to which we desire enlightenment rather than consolation, firm and prudent decisions more than tender words. Let those, then, who complain that they do not meet with direction such as they desire, turn to their own hearts. The confessor will be rebuked at the supreme tribunal, if he has carried out the work of God negligently, if he has not acted the good Samaritan, and poured into the wounds of the poor stricken man the wine which cleanses and purifies with the oil that soothes his pain. But how many penitents will have to answer for the want of faith, humility, simplicity, and obedience which they have shown in their relations with their director !

SECTION II.—SPECIAL RULES FOR THE DIRECTION OF SOULS OF THE SECOND DEGREE.

93. In treating of this question, we shall follow the same procedure as in the former case, especially as the counsels given for the direction of souls of the first degree are also

to the point here. The dwellers in the second mansion, although somewhat more advanced, are still in a state of spiritual infancy, and they still need to be kept in leading-strings and to be led on by easy steps.

94. *They need to be further enlightened.*

The task of initiating in Christian ideas beginners who are still absorbed in material cares, began in the first mansion, and is not yet completed. The faith of these souls needs revivifying. We must, from time to time, insist on the motives already indicated in order to inspire them with the desire for a more serious life, and this especially because they are now more sensitive to grace and more docile to the exhortations given them. They will easily recognize the fact that they are too much attached to worldly things, and too careless with regard to spiritual blessings. We should profit by their acknowledgment to show them forcibly how prejudicial is this error, and thus induce them to think more of the interests of their souls, and to pray urgently to God for those spiritual graces for which they appear to have so little eagerness.

These inhabitants of the second mansion have less repugnance for pious books, although they are as yet incapable of any very serious reading. The Gospels, the *Lives of the Saints*, some short passages of the *Imitation*, may be fruitfully recommended to them. But it is mental prayer, above all, that will communicate more abundant light to their souls. And, in fact, it will be well to recommend to them at this point the practice of discursive meditation, and if we can get them to be faithful to it, we shall do them a great deal of good.

We shall speak of meditation in a special chapter.

95. *The Training of these Souls to a more Fundamentally Christian Life.*—We will place under the same heads as before the various means of sanctification which should be resorted to: Prayer, the sanctification of common actions, mortification, Sacraments.

§ I. *Prayer.*

96. On this point, again, we have little to say that is new. These souls are not as yet so thoroughly exercised in prayer that we can afford to neglect to recommend to them frequently, as to beginners, the duty of regularity and attention (see above, p. 32).

We must also uphold them in times of trial. In fact, as has been observed with much truth, while sufferings and trials are powerful incentives to prayer in the case of fervent souls, those who are less advanced feel a great repugnance to devotional exercises in the hour of trial, and too often begin to neglect them. If they understood their true interests, they would never be more faithful than at such moments ; more energy is no doubt needed at these times, but by that very fact more merit is acquired ; they would show greater fidelity to God, and derive much spiritual benefit from their prayers and pious exercises.¹

When under such circumstances they confess that they have fallen back into relaxation, dissipation of mind, or sin, the first counsel to give them is this : " It was impossible that it should be otherwise, since you grew weary of prayer. You will continue in this trying condition of distaste for goodness, of weary struggles, and even of sin, until by generous efforts you have overcome your repugnance for prayer. Before all things, pray and pray again, in spite of difficulty, in spite of the little attraction that you feel for it, for there is no other way of emerging from this troublesome state of soul and of finding peace of heart once more."

97. But even apart from such circumstance we may

¹ " It must be observed," says St. Ignatius (*Spiritual Exercises*), " that if it is easy in times of consolation to give a full hour to contemplation, in times of desolation, it is, on the contrary, very difficult to finish it. For this reason the beginner ought always to continue a little beyond the hour, in order to counterbalance the desolation and to conquer temptations. He will thus accustom himself not only to resist the enemy, but even to overthrow him."

insistently urge supererogatory prayers upon these Christians. We shall benefit them greatly, for instance, by getting them to assist at daily Mass. And at such times as the beginning of Lent, of the month of Mary, or that of the Rosary, we may suggest to them that there is no better means of sanctifying these seasons of grace than by assisting every day at the Holy Sacrifice. So with the chaplet, we can urge them to join the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. If they wish to obtain some grace, even a temporal one, we may recommend them to make a novena, during which they will hear Mass daily, or make a visit to the church, or recite the chaplet every evening. In this way we induce them to undertake works of piety from which they had perhaps shrunk as being above their strength, and which they are astonished to find that they can perform. Then it becomes easier to lead them on little by little to a high state of fidelity. Devotion to the holy souls in purgatory, besides its intrinsic merits and the blessings it draws down, has also the advantage of making these Christians pray more fervently.

We think it may be useful to repeat here what we have already said : as to the duty of the director to see that his penitent prays with recollection, and struggles against routine and inattention. " Always begin your prayer, whether mental or vocal," says St. Francis of Sales, " by putting yourself in the presence of God ; never fail in this rule, and you will soon see how useful it is to you."

§ 2. The Sanctification of Common Actions.

98. In treating this question as regards beginners, we said that, in order to accustom them to live a supernatural life, it was useful to make them give an account of the manner in which, at the beginning of each day, they offered their works and their sufferings to God. The Christians of whom we are here speaking are already initiated to some degree in the supernatural life, and we will point

out two means by which they may be trained in it more completely—that is to say, recollection and a definite rule of life.

99. *Recollection*.—They will admit that one of the greatest obstacles to the service of God which they meet with is either the thoughtlessness of their age (if they are still young), or, if older, the various preoccupations, business worries, and anxieties of every kind which tend to make them lose sight of the care of their souls. Having won this admission from them, and having forcibly demonstrated the sad effects of this dissipation, and their consequent loss with regard to eternity, we must urgently advise them to recollect themselves from time to time, and recommend themselves to God, asking His help, and offering Him what they are doing. The *offering of the hour* may then be suggested to them with advantage ; it consists in making a short prayer or ejaculation whenever we hear the clock strike the hour, or, again, renewing the offering of our works and good resolutions.

100. *Rule of Life*.—Another very efficacious means of preserving souls from that dissipation which is so natural to the human heart is to get them to follow a simple and easy rule of life. We repeat simple and easy, since it is evident that we must avoid minute and detailed prescriptions, which would be suitable only for persons more advanced in piety ; and that we can only trace it on the broad lines of the Christian life. This rule will direct them as to (1) when and how to pray, and what religious practices to adopt ; (2) what virtues they should specially cultivate ; and (3) it should contain some counsels as to their ordinary occupations and the duties of their state of life.

As a specimen, we give in the Appendix a rule of life for children who already show a real disposition to piety, and who have become members of a religious confraternity. These children may have already attained to the second mansion. Their devotional exercises consist of their morning and evening prayers, spiritual reading, particular

examen, receiving the Sacraments, and devotion to our Blessed Lady. This is all laid down. The duties of their state of life are studying and class-work, and they are told how to study. Finally, the virtues that they must specially cultivate are obedience, which sums up their duty towards their superiors ; patience and gentleness, which regulate their relations with their equals, and Christian self-denial, which will teach them to gain the mastery over themselves, and to avoid becoming the slaves of their evil tendencies. A word is added as to holy purity, on account of the importance of this quickly sullied virtue.

If it is easy to get them to accept a rule of life, it is more difficult to keep them to it. And so it will be well often to speak on this point, both in the public instructions to the confraternity, and privately in the confessional. At one time we may choose one of the points of the rule, explain it, and dwell on its importance ; and at another we may inquire into the manner in which it has been observed.

§ 3. *Renunciation.*

101. Here, again, we have to continue the work already begun in the first mansion. The task has now become less difficult, and we can insist more strongly on this all-important point.

Struggle against Sin—Examination of Conscience.—The first thing to be done is to fight against faults and diminish the number of venial sins. When an otherwise sufficiently enlightened Christian, firm and sincere of faith, and practising habits of piety, remains, as it were, fixed in a state of half-tepidity, and does not make that progress which we should expect from his way of living, the reason of his torpor is easy to guess ; it is the sins, though they be only venial sins, to which he is addicted.

The daily examination of conscience is a very efficacious remedy for this evil ; those who never examine themselves, or only do so from time to time, may commit a number of

faults without paying any attention to them, and will scarcely arrive at any real knowledge of themselves.

It is, however, quite true that when a person seriously gives himself to God's service, and knows how to keep recollected, the grace which is poured into his mind enlightens him silently, and shows him many faults which had before escaped his notice, even without his searching for them. Still, the soul's industry in examining the conscience, far from injuring this action of grace, favours it particularly.

Examination of conscience is, indeed, indispensable, especially in the case described above, in which a man of good-will, who has a sincere desire to advance, remains in a sort of spiritual torpor which is solely due to his numerous sins. It is also very useful for people who are good but not very recollected, who wish to serve God, but through heedlessness and the worry of temporal business think too little about their souls. Examination of conscience, especially if we can get them to practise it at midday as well as in the evening, insensibly makes them more watchful, draws sincere acts of contrition from their hearts, and causes them to renew their good resolutions ; and all this tends to prevent the fatal results of sin, helps to make them more attentive to duty and more zealous for the sanctification of their lives.

102. But we must confess that the usefulness of this practice is only equalled by the difficulty of getting beginners to take it up. It costs so much to our poor human nature to have to stop to consider its own miseries ; and, then, this examination into the different actions of the day is a really fatiguing task. We shall only obtain regularity in this exercise by constantly urging its importance. If people do not see the great utility of a practice which is so far from agreeable, they are hardly likely to pursue it with ardour or perseverance.

Even pagan philosophers recommended their disciples to learn to know themselves. *Γνῶθι σεαυτόν* (Know thyself) was one of the wise maxims of antiquity. To enter

into oneself is to open the shutters of one's soul that the light may pass in freely ; if they remain hermetically sealed, the rooms will be in darkness even when there is the most brilliant sunshine outside. Thus, even amid fervent surroundings the souls of those who never examine themselves would remain plunged in darkness. How is it possible to correct our faults or cure our interior ailments if we are not conscious of them ? how shall we know them with any exactness save by serious examination ?

103. But these examinations of conscience ought to be made in the presence of God and with sincere humility. "Do not be astonished," the prudent director will say, "to find such a number of faults and evil tendencies in your hearts. The more you progress in virtue, the more God will give you His light, in order that you may know better and better the utter corruption of your nature ; but, at the same time, do not give way to vexation at finding how bad you are ; if your revolted pride does not reject His light, God will make you understand that He loves you in spite of your weaknesses, as the mother loves her feeble, sickly child. He will make you comprehend the power of grace, which can so easily bring good out of evil and change all your failings into resplendent virtues. Therefore, never make your examination of conscience without first thinking of the love of God, and never end it without an act of confidence in His wisdom, His power, and His mercy."

104. In order to ensure more fidelity in this practice, we should make our penitents account to us with regard to it, and recommend them to accuse themselves when they have neglected it. We should also take care to lay down a good method of examination, which will make it easier. Without a method the mind wanders, distractions come, and, after useless and tiring efforts, this salutary exercise is given up.

Here is a method that may be recommended.

Begin by asking God for grace to know your sins and to detest them. Then turn to Mary, without whom you

should do nothing, saying to her very simply : " Dear Mother, get me grace to see my faults clearly, and to humble myself for them."

Then review the different acts of the day in the following order :

How have I acted—

(1) In my duties towards God—(a) my prayers ; (b) my other devotional exercises ?

(2) Towards my neighbour—(a) meekness ; (b) charity ; (c) obedience ; (d) truth ?

(3) Towards myself—(a) patience ; (b) humility ; (c) temperance ; (d) purity ; (e) as to the duties of my state of life, sanctification of my work ?

End by asking God's pardon with all your heart, and promising to do better for the future.

105. *The Ruling Passion*.—Among the faults that we have to combat, the besetting or ruling passion comes first. St. Ignatius, in his *Spiritual Exercises* (on Discernment of Spirits) says : " The demon imitates a captain who wants to take a place where he hopes to find a rich booty. He pitches his camp, he considers his forces and the circumstances of the place, and he attacks it on its weak side. So it is with the enemy of the human race. He is ever prowling round us, examining from every point each of our virtues, theological, cardinal, and moral, and when he has discovered the spot which is weakest and least provided with the armour of salvation, it is there that he makes his attack, and that he tries to capture us.

This weak side, this vulnerable spot, which our enemy knows so well, is our ruling passion. In the Christians with whom we are now dealing this is easy to distinguish, since it has been but little fought against. Later on, especially when the sensible attractions of grace have greater hold upon the soul, and calm its evil tendencies, the detection of this ruling passion becomes more difficult.

106. This, we think, is the best way to proceed in order to discover it : First, we must make the penitent pray

earnestly for the help of God's Holy Spirit, for it is thus that we must always begin. Without this Divine Spirit, without the help of His grace, man is but darkness and error; and then, we cannot insist too strongly on doing nothing, beginning nothing, without prayer.

After this, the director will recommend his penitent to examine, with great care and repeatedly, as to the most frequent subject of his thoughts : what he generally thinks about the first thing on waking in the morning ; what is the object of his day-dreams when he is alone ; what are the most usual causes of his feelings of joy and vexation, or of his grief when he is sad ; what is the intention that he most often proposes to himself ; what the motive which makes him act, and which habitually inspires his conduct ; what the source of his faults, the reason of his sins, especially when it is not some one accidental fault, but a whole series, a state of resistance to grace, or omission of his devotional exercises, which has lasted some days ; what is the origin of it all, and what is the reason which has prevented him from returning to God. No doubt there will be accidental causes of all these different feelings and actions, and sometimes mere passing ideas will have given rise to such and such particular circumstances ; but still, it will all often be the consequence of an interior disposition of mind, of an habitual tendency which is, in fact, the ruling passion.

We may also detect the ruling passion from the attacks of the tempter, who often knows us better than we know ourselves, and who, as St. Ignatius says in the passage already quoted, is skilful in directing his onslaughts against that side of us which he knows to be weakest. We may also recognize it by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, Who, in moments of fervour, when His working within us is most sensibly felt, makes us understand by the sacrifices that He asks of us, by the interior drawings that He makes us feel, by the resolutions that He suggests to us, which is the road that will lead us to perfection, and which is that vice against which we must fight most resolutely. We

recognize it, again, by the difficulty felt in combating it ; it is our darling sin which it costs us most to sacrifice.

107. The ruling passion once discovered, we must apply ourselves to its destruction. When the defenders of a town know the weak spot at which the enemy will direct his attacks and try to make a breach, is it not here that they concentrate their efforts ? Is it not necessary before everything to guard against this danger ? By thus fortifying ourselves, we do more than make ourselves safe : we ensure the victory ; for when the ruling passion is conquered the demon is vanquished. His future attacks are hardly to be feared ; they will turn to the advantage of the Christian soul rather than to its loss. When Goliath was overthrown, the Philistines were put to flight ; when Holophernes was killed, the Assyrian troops experienced defeat after defeat, and the Hebrews were delivered from their enemies for a long period.

However, we must not flatter ourselves that we have gained this decisive victory so easily. So long as we have not made any serious progress in piety, so long as we have not entered and even dwelt for some time in the third mansion—that is to say, in the way of true devotion—and even in the fourth, which is the state of fervour, the ruling passion will remain very much alive ; but from this moment, from the point of the spiritual life which we have now reached, we must begin this combat, and pursue it henceforth with courage and perseverance. This will be the surest means of arriving at perfection.

Prayer is, of course, the first remedy against the ruling passion. To offer to God with this intention rosaries, novenas, Communions, acts of mortification—these are excellent means which deserve to be encouraged, or, if necessary, suggested.

A second means, also very efficacious, and recommended by all the masters of the spiritual life, is the particular examen. To the general examination of conscience, of which we have already spoken, we should join a special

examination as to the ruling passion. St. Ignatius, in his *Book of Spiritual Exercises*, advises the use of a special notebook, each page of which is divided into as many lines as there are days in the week. We should mark on each line a number of points corresponding to the number of times into which we have fallen into this particular fault. The Saint wishes that the length of the lines should diminish as the days go on, to remind us that the number of our falls should also diminish daily. An excellent plan is to add to the particular examen a *sanction*—that is to say, a penance which we impose on ourselves for each fault committed. This penance may be a prayer, a half-hour's silence, some mortification fixed on beforehand, almsgiving, etc. Thus we may expiate our sins, and oblige ourselves to be more circumspect for the future. We all know the story of the nursing sister who had charge of an old general who was in the habit of blaspheming without noticing it, and how she managed to cure him by making him pay five shillings for the poor every time he swore. Fear is for us the beginning of wisdom, and since we behave too often like children, we ought to treat ourselves like children, and conquer ourselves by the fear of punishments.

108. *Humility and Mortification*.—Whether we know our ruling passion or not, there are two faults which it is necessary to combat early in the spiritual life, for in them we find the great obstacles which oppose the progress of the soul: these are pride and the excessive love of comfort.

Pride is the cause of all sins. *Initium omnis peccati superbia*. All know that it brings in its train every sort of wrong-doing—vanity, ambition, touchiness, discords, insubordination, etc. We will explain later on how to make war on these faults; it is, indeed, only after the soul has entered generously on the path of perfection that it can gain the mastery over self-love. It is important, however, to unmask this enemy at once, and we should clearly point out to the penitent what harm its pride does, and occasions for so doing will not certainly fail us. To begin with, most

of its sorrows and vexations come from this cause ; and who can reckon the sins that are due to it, the trials badly borne, the good opportunities neglected, the multiplied resistances to grace which spring from this stupid feeling of self-esteem ?

We must therefore point out this evil while we deplore it, encourage souls to resist it, and, above all, urge them most earnestly to beg God to make them more humble. We must tell them that if they cannot overcome it alone, they will certainly be able to do so with the assistance of God's grace. "Earnestly pray for humility," we should say ; "for when you have gained this beautiful virtue, the others will come of themselves, and you will advance rapidly along the way of true devotion."

109. But there is a form of self-love which frequently shows itself at this stage of the spiritual life, and which needs to be energetically repressed, and that is human respect. As a rule, imperfect souls pay little attention to this point, and yet human respect often paralyses their good dispositions ; they will not pray with that devotion of which they are capable, nor receive the Sacraments with that frequency to which they feel themselves drawn, because they are afraid of what people will say. And if we do not examine them on this point, they will seldom reveal this weakness to us ; a prudent director, however, will know how to make them acknowledge it, and will exhort them most fervently to fight against this fatal tendency.

There is only one means of getting cured of fear : it is to brave the phantom, which always appears more formidable at a distance than when seen at close quarters. When the bird has once found out that the scarecrow is only a helpless figure, an empty show, then it approaches it boldly, and is not stopped any more by foolish terrors. We must make all whose good-will is paralysed by human respect understand that they are letting themselves be frightened by mere phantoms, and insist on their taking energetic steps and acting courageously. If, for instance, they are afraid

of appearing too devout, we should oblige them to make open profession of their religious sentiments, to show by their acts or words that they have an esteem for piety, and desire to apply themselves to God worthily. If the fear of foolish ridicule keeps them away from the Holy Table, or at least hinders them from approaching it as often as they would otherwise do in response to the secret attractions of Divine grace, we should give them as a penance to go one day to Holy Communion in the most public manner. This little act is not above their strength, and it is usually but the first step which is difficult ; when once they have got over this barrier, the way of the spiritual life opens widely before them, and is easy to their feet.

110. We must point out another occasion where there is also need to insist with special emphasis on this virtue of humility.

We find among our penitents eccentric, obstinate, and touchy characters, who, like fiery, restive horses, champ against the bit, and are a continual source of anxiety to those who drive them. The director may gain great profit in the other world from having to direct these poor people ; they are a real source of merit. Great patience and sympathy, joined with a gentle firmness, are necessary. Only the Almighty can cure these twisted minds ; the sole remedy that we can apply, difficult as it is, is humility. This will keep their outbursts in check, and spare them many a folly. We should therefore continually impress on them the value of this virtue, and constantly insist on blind obedience ; for without humility and without obedience there is everything to fear for them, and nothing to hope.

111. As to the love of ease and pleasure, we have said above (No. 44) that it must be resisted from the outset of the spiritual life. It is easy to show the need of this to souls of good-will ; they comprehend the necessity of penance and of sacrifice. The saying of the *Imitation* is justly renowned : *Tantum proficies, quantum tibi ipsi vim*

intuleris—The more thou doest violence to thyself, the more progress shalt thou make (Book I., chap. xxv.). Is it not, indeed, by this very spirit of renunciation that we recognize the true disciples of the Gospel, the real children of Jesus Christ ? Yes, indeed, he alone is a true Christian who does not fear to suffer a little for the love of a God Who has suffered so much for him ; who wishes to expiate his sins by penance ; who, knowing how to conquer himself, and not to yield to all his whims and caprices, overcomes his faults, and in the end triumphs over them almost without a struggle. On the other hand, he who always does his own will ends by becoming the most unhappy and the most vicious of men.

There is one period especially when these counsels will be well received, and that is Lent. An excellent plan with the young is to give them at the beginning of this holy season a paper containing a list of mortifications which they may practise, with a few words explaining the reasons for doing penance. In the Appendix we give a list of penances for the use of young boys, and another for girls.

Outside Lent, we may, from time to time, choose one or other of these mortifications, and tell them to practise it for a week or a fortnight, and afterwards inquire as to how they have observed it.

112. Another excellent form of detachment—in fact, an obligatory one—is almsgiving. He who gives an alms derives from it double profit : he acquires himself of the great duty of fraternal charity which is so dear to the heart of God, and he practices the important virtue of self-sacrifice. Thus, the alms profits him who gives more than him who receives, according to the saying of Jesus : *Beatus est magis dare quam accipere* (Acts xx. 35).

It is often a delicate matter to have to remind others of this obligation ; people do not like to admit to themselves that they are hard-hearted towards their neighbours and too much attached to their wealth, and, *a fortiori*, they do not like some one else to suspect them of this failing. There

is another fault no less common, but which is admitted with better grace, and that is discharging these duties of charity from a purely natural feeling of compassion only, without raising the intention to God. Whether it regards alms-giving or those numerous acts of kindness or charity towards our neighbour, for which we find an occasion at every step, this absence of a supernatural motive causes a really deplorable loss of merit. If we draw attention to this point, and teach our penitents to supernaturalize these acts of charity—for instance, to see Jesus Christ under the rags of a poor man—we render them a great service. In this way, too, we may be able to reproach their selfishness without seeming to do so, and recall the duty of fraternal charity to those who only live for themselves, and have no idea of making the least sacrifice for their neighbour.

* 113. *Passive Mortification—Patience.*—We have just described the active part that the soul ought to take in the practice of mortification. God, however, does not leave it to itself in this necessary work, but He provides it with trials and crosses, which, if bravely borne, will cause it to make great progress on this difficult path. If Divine Providence did not thus take part in the work, human cowardice is so great that the expiation of our past sins would always remain incomplete ; and thus we should never by ourselves reach that degree of detachment which is necessary if we would make still further progress and receive yet more abundant graces.

These trials are those vexations of every sort that we meet with here below—from the elements : bodily calamities, sickness, trials arising from temperament or the rigour of the seasons ; from the circumstances of our lives : loss of property, poverty, with its privations, desires thwarted, plans that miscarry, and hopes deceived ; from our fellow-men : opposition, misunderstandings, reproaches, whether just or undeserved, criticisms, etc. ; and, finally, the sorrows of our own hearts : bereavements, separations, and, in one word,

all that troop of griefs and vexations which accompanies man from the cradle to the tomb.

Blessed are they who know the secret of turning all these trials to their spiritual advantage, and drawing profit from their tribulations! These, after all, are not too heavy, and are quickly over, and patient souls win thereby the eternal weight of sublime and incomparable glory. *Momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostræ, supra modum in sublimitate æternum gloriæ pondus operatur in nobis* (2 Cor. iv. 17).

114. But perfect patience is not acquired in a day, and the beginners with whom we are dealing need to be led towards it very gently and tenderly, for it is most important not to overpress them. Thus, when they make their complaints and open their griefs (and we must, if necessary, provoke these confidences) the director should begin by following that they indeed have reason to complain, and he should be careful to agree as to what is well grounded in their lamentation, and then, having sympathized with them to some extent, he should go on : "All this is true, and it is very painful to have to put up with such things ; humanly speaking, you are perfectly right, but since we are Christians, let us look at it from a Christian point of view. God has permitted this vexatious annoyance. He did not choose to spare you this trial, though He might have done so had He willed. Nevertheless, He loves you ; He is a kind Father who desires your good with all His heart ; He therefore saw in this some advantage and profit for your soul." And then, if need be, the director will enlarge upon the doctrine of the utility of suffering, a truth of capital importance which is yet so difficult of acceptance. *Beati qui lugent* (Blessed are they that mourn). The reply will nearly always be an act of assent, accompanied by a new complaint : "What you say is very true, but the trial is not less hard for that." "Yes," he will insist, "it is indeed hard, but God never tries us above our strength. Do not give way to discouragement ; make an effort, and

God will help you to submit. If you do not feel the courage to embrace your cross, ask Him to make you stronger, to give you the resolution which you need. If you had prayed more fervently, and, above all, if you had returned to the charge without letting yourself be discouraged, besieging the Master with entreaties until He had bestowed on you that Christian energy which is lacking, you would now be more resigned, and would say, like our Lord : ‘ My God, may Thy will be done, and not my own.’ Come, pluck up your courage, and, above all, *pray!* And if a too bitter complaint, or even a murmur, should yet escape you sometimes, do not think that all is lost : it is not to be expected that you will arrive all at once at the point of perfect resignation ; rather on these occasions humble yourself, pray still more, and force yourself yet again to make acts of patience and submission.”

This is the sort of exhortation that will constantly have to be repeated by the director, for trials play a great part in our lives, and there is, perhaps, no more useful service that he can render to the poor souls under his care than thus teaching them to bear their crosses well.

But we shall hardly persuade them to be more resigned unless we really enter into their sorrows, and make them see that we understand the bitterness of their cup—unless, in fact, we show that we have the truly sympathizing heart of a tender father. It will be more easy to convince them of their duty if they see that we are trying to teach them to bear their sufferings well for their own sakes, and out of the interest and affection that we bear them. Then they will learn to understand that this great science of suffering is indispensable to their happiness even in this world, that by a lack of patience they would only make themselves unhappy—that they cannot, in fact, flatter themselves that they love God unless they are willing to suffer somewhat for Him.

Happy is the director who knows how to make his penitents earnestly desire this virtue of resignation, who

brings them to hold it in great esteem and to pray for it fervently.

115. How Souls are to be encouraged.—We have treated this question of renunciation at some length because of its importance, and also of its difficulty. In whatever form we impress it on them, whether in that of active mortification or resignation, we shall not induce beginners to embrace it without some trouble. Especially will it be necessary to encourage and support them. Let us hear what the wise Father Lallemant says of these beginners : “ Encourage them greatly in the changes and chances of life. Blame them also sometimes discreetly when they have been in the wrong, especially when the fault is a somewhat serious one ; but never, however, let them go away without encouragement. This is a course which we must adopt generally with regard to souls who are still weak—*i.e.*, always to moderate the bitterness of a reprimand by the sweetness of encouragement. For we must give these souls every possible consolation.”¹

Thus, when we are able to see that some effort has been made, that the penitent has really done violence to his nature in some point, or has had the grace to accept some suffering, however light it may be, with Christian resignation, we ought to show him our satisfaction, urge him to thank God, even make him sometimes recite a hymn of thanksgiving, such as the *Magnificat*. In this way we make him more sanguine, and by increasing his confidence we give a new ardour to his good desires.

116. Souls struggling with Mortal Sin.—We have already remarked, among those with whom we are now dealing, an astounding mixture of pious sentiments and deplorable frailties, but, what is even more surprising, and yet by no

¹ *Doctrine Spirit*, 2 *Principe*, sect. ii., chap. vi. It is rather for souls who are already devout, yet who have made but little progress in piety, that these words of Father Lallemant are meant. So it is clear that they must be applied *a fortiori* to the souls of whom we are speaking here. Cf. St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*.

means rare, is the discovery of really good dispositions mingled with grave sins in the same person. Faith is strong and lively ; the enlightened soul knows its religion perfectly, is attached to its duties, and sometimes gives itself to prayer with real fervour, and yet, in spite of all this, it falls into shameful sins. The sinner rises again from his falls, returns once more to the service of God, gains real merit, and yet falls again. Such grave want of constancy disconcerts the directors ; they ask themselves anxiously what remedies they can apply to such a state of things. It is certain that in these poor souls faith is more developed than charity, and that only a more perfect detachment from self can cure them of their wrong-doings. However, not to judge them too severely, we should take into consideration the violence of passion and the suddenness of the fall, which in certain cases almost prevents deliberation and greatly extenuates the guilt.

Their responsibility is even less, and is sometimes altogether non-existent, when the state of their nerves is such as to destroy the balance of the soul's faculties, and to give a deplorable predominance to the sensitive imagination, thus diminishing to an often unsuspected degree the due action of the reason.

Such poor nervous people, while recognizing that they have acted in certain circumstances under the influence of an extreme excitement of the senses, believe that they remained fully conscious of their acts and had the entire mastery over their will ; whereas, as a matter of fact, they had lost control over their actions to a very great extent. In case of doubt, theologians say, the degree of consent must be appreciated *ex communiter contingentibus*—that is, when there is a doubt as to whether there was full deliberation in certain actions we must be guided in our judgment by the habitual dispositions of the penitent.

However this may be, it is more than ever important, when dealing with such souls, to bring forward all those means of grace which we have already pointed out : *per-*

severance in prayer, invoking our Blessed Lady with filial confidence, energetic practice of mortification, constant and regular use of the Sacraments. But it is prayer, above all, and meditation on the four last things which will give courage to wage this combat against the most stubborn passions with valour and constancy. St. Alphonsus says that many people fast, recite the rosary and the office of the Blessed Virgin, and yet remain in sin ; but that it is impossible that one who is faithful to the practice of mental prayer should continue to live in enmity with God (*Praxis Confess.*; see below, No. 125).

§ 4. *The Use of the Sacraments.*

117. "Without Me," our Lord has said, "you can do nothing." The various means of grace that we have already enumerated—prayer, the sanctification of our ordinary daily actions, and mortification—are indeed excellent and of great efficacy ; but how much of their power they lose if we are not careful to supplement them with the frequent use of the Sacraments !

The Sacraments are the instruments of sanctification which God in His infinite wisdom has chosen as the most appropriate to the needs of His creatures. It would be madness to pretend to know better than God, and to prefer human devices to these divinely chosen means of grace. The Holy Eucharist, especially, must be our chief strength—the Eucharist which contains the Principle and Source of all perfection, and the Author of all sanctity. Those who wish to live by Jesus must even feed on Jesus. By His frequent visits to the interior of the soul, Jesus will insensibly communicate to them His Divine inspirations, forming their thoughts and judgments after the pattern of His own ; He will communicate to them His own sentiments, which will move them to love what He loves, to desire what He desires, and to reject what He rejects. They will become more and more like unto Him.

118. In order that it may produce these happy fruits, Holy Communion should be received frequently ; this is the desire of the Lord Himself : *Caro mea vere est cibus* (My flesh is food indeed). It should be, then, according to our Lord's own plan, not a rare State banquet, but the common and ordinary nourishment of our souls. The director must employ all his zeal and skill to induce his penitents to receive our Lord often, especially with those who are good and well disposed, but who desire to communicate at long intervals only. He should use all his arts of persuasion, congratulating them on what they have already accomplished, while he presses them to do yet more. "Do you regret," he should say to them, "the Communions that you have made ? Is it not true, on the contrary, that you feel pleased and happy when you have been to the Holy Table, and that if you do not communicate more often it is solely because you shrink from the trouble ? It costs you something, and you do not want to make this little effort. Ah ! if you could understand how great a good you deprive yourself of ; if you knew with what tender love Jesus would come to you ; how anxious He is to visit you and to bring you His gifts ; what pressing invitations He sends you ! In the hour of death and through all eternity will you not congratulate yourself on having often received the kiss of Jesus, of having been frequently to drink at the Source of all grace and of all merit ?"

Parochi partes erunt fideles crebro adhortari ut . . . hoc sacramento nutriendæ animæ curam non abjiciant, says the Catechism of the Council of Trent. Yes, it is the duty of pastors often to remind their flocks of our Lord's ardent desire to give Himself to His children ; they must tell out the Church's mind on this point, and dissipate the prejudices which make frequent and even weekly Communion to be regarded, too often, as a practice of perfection which is only fitted for certain elect souls ; while, as a matter of fact, weekly Communion, at least, should be the normal practice of the faithful. Was it not so in the times of the Apostles—

yes, and even up to the beginning of the Middle Ages ? Then weekly Communion, and for many centuries and in many countries even more frequent Communion, was not the exception, but the common practice of ordinary Christians. Would the Church have been able to conquer the world at that epoch of her formation and growth, in that age of struggles and dangers (which is so like our own), if her children, deprived as they were of all external succour and exposed to all the perils of contact with the pagan world, had not had the help of frequent Communion to sustain them in the conflict ? The Council of Trent desired to see the faithful communicate sacramentally every time they heard Mass, and it is of obligation to hear Mass every Sunday. This desire is easily understood if we reflect that *many souls can only overcome their temptations and remain in a state of grace* by receiving the Blessed Sacrament frequently.

119. Those who only communicate on great festivals should be recommended to do so also on less important feasts—on those of the Blessed Virgin, for instance. When they have been prevented on the festival itself, we should advise them to come as soon as possible afterwards, in order not to deprive themselves of so great a blessing by putting off their Communion until the next feast comes round. Others may be advised to communicate every month, every fortnight, or every week. A bereavement, the loss of a relation or friend, will be an opportunity for getting them to come more often, since the greatest service we can render the departed is to pray, and to go to Holy Communion for them. Guilds and confraternities, such as that of the Holy Rosary and the Third Orders, and many other similar organizations, form excellent means for inducing the faithful to approach the Sacraments more frequently.

Again, we cannot but approve the zeal of those priests who get the young to go to Holy Communion on six successive Sundays in honour of St. Aloysius, in order to

accustom them to the more frequent use of this Blessed Sacrament. The Popes have encouraged this devotion by granting to each of these six Communions a plenary indulgence, provided that they are made on consecutive Sundays. We may seize the opportunity of the approach of an examination, or the *début* into the world, or, again, of some great grace that they wish to obtain, to recommend this excellent practice. Those who have thus been to Holy Communion for six successive Sundays will be more easily induced to form a regular habit of communicating frequently.

Again, we may note another method which has often been found successful in introducing frequent Communion among those who did not practise it, and in cases where old-established custom, human respect, or ignorant prejudice seem to make the innovation specially difficult. We may take advantage of some favourable season (such as the month of Mary, or that of the Sacred Heart, or, again, the month of the Holy Souls) to propose to those whom we wish to influence that, in order to celebrate better these sacred seasons, which are so dear to all true Christians, they should agree among themselves to take turns to go to Holy Communion for each other's intentions, so that every day there should be one or even several Communions for the intentions of the community, parish, school, college, or confraternity, whatever it may be.

Again, we may advise our penitents to keep their own birthdays, and those of their parents or their pastor, as well as the anniversaries of their baptism and first Communion, by going to Holy Communion, not to mention the first Friday of each month, according to the holy practice said to have been taught by our Divine Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary.

120. However, it is not sufficient to induce the faithful to communicate frequently : it is no less important to teach them to communicate well. For this purpose nothing is better or more to be recommended than the custom of St. Aloysius, which consists, as we all know,

in dividing the interval between our Communions into two parts, and consecrating the first days to thanksgiving and the others to preparation. The thought that we have received, or are about to receive, our Lord, must prove a powerful incentive to lead a truly Christian life ; while, on the other hand, Communions thus prepared for will surely produce the best results.

Without adding anything further, the various practices that we have already enumerated—prayer, the offering of our actions, fidelity in Christian self-denial—can all be exercised with this intention, and thus all may become acts of preparation for Holy Communion, or of thanksgiving after it. Thus the Eucharist will be the centre towards which all the rest will converge, the reception of this Divine Sacrament will produce far greater fruits of sanctification, while all these good works will in their turn derive from the Holy Communion a greater efficacy and a higher merit.

Souls such as we are now dealing with should, according to the rules commonly laid down by theologians, be allowed to communicate weekly, and those among them who show a good-will and prepare themselves as we have just described for the reception of this Divine Sacrament may, by the same rules, be permitted, and even encouraged, to communicate during the week as well ; for they are living as good Christians should live, they are devoted to works of piety, and hardly, if ever, give way to venial sins with full deliberation.

SECTION III.—SUMMARY OF THE METHOD OF DIRECTION BEST ADAPTED FOR THE SOULS OF THIS SECOND DEGREE.

121. The method of direction for these souls is not such a complicated matter as it might seem at first sight. With the exception of certain details, necessary under

special circumstances or on extraordinary occasions, the method of direction can be easily summed up. A few well-chosen questions in the confessional, after the penitent has finished his self-accusation, will quickly enable us to give the most beneficial advice. We will now point out the sort of questions that will help us to understand the dispositions of the penitent, and thus to remind him of the steps which he must take in order to make progress in the spiritual life.

(1) *Prayer*.—(a) Have you tried to recollect yourself before beginning to pray? (b) Have you prayed with fervour to the Blessed Virgin this week? (c) Have you been faithful to the practice of mental prayer?

(2) *Sanctification of Ordinary Actions*.—In this past week have you often thought of God during the day, offering Him your works and occupations, or recommending yourself to Him by some ejaculatory prayer?

(3) *Mortification : the Struggle against Failings*.—
(a) How have you made your examination of conscience, and how have you striven to correct your faults, especially your besetting sin? Have you thought seriously of this and made real efforts, and have you any victories to record? Have your faults been due to weakness, or have you sinned deliberately and of set purpose? (b) Patience. Have you accepted with resignation and out of love for God all your trials, great and small? (c) Mortification. Have you made any sacrifices?

(4) *The Sacraments*.—Have you made a serious and fervent preparation for your Communions this last week or fortnight?

Let us remark, while on the subject of the Sacraments, that it will be good to question the faithful from time to time as to their preparation for confession, and, above all, to excite them to contrition.

122. The very fact of putting such questions frequently will be sufficient to inspire the penitent with good resolutions. If his answers are satisfactory we must congratulate

him and encourage him to persevere; if otherwise, we must exhort him earnestly to set to work. "What! you say that you love God, and yet will do nothing for Him? This time you have not made the smallest effort, the most insignificant act of love. If you were to be judged by the actions of this last week or fortnight, what would the Supreme Judge find in you that deserved reward? Here, then, is a whole week, or two weeks, which are almost wasted for eternity. Come, be brave, show a little more generosity; be faithful in these small things, and God will give you a great reward."

We have already pointed out how useful such a method is, and how inadequate it would be were we always to confine ourselves to giving general advice, and exhortations which are more or less commonplace, and often of little practical value. We must enter into the little details of life if we wish to be true directors and to do some good to souls.

Will it always be possible to put all the above questions? Undoubtedly not. Time would fail most priests, and, besides, it is often not enough to direct, we have sometimes to push on indolent souls with urgent exhortations. A certain variety is necessary, and it will not be without advantage if we call the attention of our penitent to the different points in succession.

CHAPTER III

ON MENTAL PRAYER

SECTION I.—ON MENTAL PRAYER IN GENERAL.

§ 1. *Its Importance.*

123. "If you would suffer the trials and sorrows of this life patiently, be a man of prayer. If you would gain the courage and strength necessary to overcome the

assaults of the enemy, be a man of prayer. If you would mortify your self-will, with all its inclinations, be a man of prayer. If you would know the devices of Satan and would foil his deceits, be a man of prayer. If you would live in joy and walk sweetly in the paths of penance, be a man of prayer. If you would drive from your soul the teasing flies of vain thoughts and anxieties, be a man of prayer. If you would nourish your soul with the marrow of devotion, and would have it always filled with good thoughts and good desires, be a man of prayer. If you would strengthen and confirm your courage in the ways of God, be a man of prayer. It is in prayer that we receive the union and the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who teaches all things. Further, if you would mount to the heights of contemplation, and enjoy the sweet embraces of the Bridegroom, exercise yourself in prayer. . . . We have heard and seen, and we see every day, a great number of simple people who have obtained all these graces, and greater ones yet, by means of mental prayer."

This magnificent, almost lyrical, eulogy of prayer is by St. Bonaventura. St. Peter of Alcantara, in his *Treatise on Mental Prayer and Meditation*, quotes it at length, and speaks in a similar way. Indeed, all the Saints have used the same language. "Give me a man of prayer," said St. Vincent of Paul, "and he will be fit for everything: he will be able to say with the holy Apostle, 'I can do all things through Him that strengtheneth me.'"

124. Every one knows how St. Teresa has extolled mental prayer. "To those who do not serve God, but live in sin, mental prayer is so profitable, and even so necessary! . . . Let him never cease from prayer who has once begun it, be his life ever so wicked; for prayer is the way to amend it, and without prayer such amendment will be much more difficult. . . . And as to him who has not begun to pray, I implore him, by the love of our Lord, not to deprive himself of so great a good.

"Herein there is nothing to be afraid of, but every-

thing to hope for. Granting that such a one does not advance, nor make an effort to become perfect, so as to merit the joys and consolations which the perfect receive from God, yet he will little by little attain to a knowledge of the road which leads to heaven. And if he perseveres, I hope, in the mercy of God, for him, seeing that no one ever took Him for his friend that was not amply rewarded ; *for mental prayer is nothing else, in my opinion, but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him Who we know loves us.*"

This could not be better put, and this most exact idea of mental prayer is sufficient in itself to show its immense advantages. " If it is so helpful," says St. Augustine, " to live with good men, and if their company is of such great value to us, what shall we say of those who live habitually with God ? "

St. Teresa continues : " Now, true love and lasting friendship require certain dispositions : those of our Lord, we know, are absolutely perfect—ours vicious, sensual, and thankless ; and you cannot, therefore, bring yourselves to love Him as He loves you, because you have not the disposition to do so ; and if you do not love Him, yet, seeing how much it concerns you to have His friendship, and how great is His love for you, rise above that pain you feel at being much with Him Who is so different from you.

" I cannot tell, Lord, why the whole world does not labour to draw near to Thee in this particular friendship. The wicked, who do not resemble Thee, ought to do so, in order that Thou mayest make them good, and for that purpose should permit Thee to remain with them at least for two hours daily, even though they may not remain with Thee, but, as I used to do, with a thousand distractions and with worldly thoughts. In return for this violence which they offer to themselves for the purpose of remaining in a company as good as Thine—for at first they can do no more, and even afterwards at times—Thou, O Lord, defendest them against the assaults of evil spirits, whose

power Thou restrainest, and even lessenest daily, giving to them the victory over these their enemies. So it is, O Life of all lives, Thou slayest none that put their trust in Thee, and seek Thy friendship ; yea, rather, Thou sustainest their bodily life in greater vigour, and makest their soul to live.”¹

125. St. Alphonsus de Liguori is no less positive, no less enthusiastic, we might almost say. “A prudent confessor, when he sees that a soul has a horror of mortal sin and some desire for a Christian life, *should above all else train it in the practice of mental prayer*, beginning with meditation on the great truths ; for this exercise appears to be very necessary if souls are to persevere in the grace of God . . . and there is no practice that the devil tries to hinder like that of mental prayer. . . . There is no doubt that if the earth is full of sinners and hell of lost souls, it is because the eternal truths have not been sufficiently meditated on. . . . If we were to ask the reprobate, ‘Why are you in hell ?’ most of them would reply, ‘Because we have not thought enough of hell.’ In mental prayer it is God Who speaks to us : *Ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus—I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart* (Osee ii. 14). Now, God speaks better than any preacher. It is by the practice of mental prayer that all the Saints have been sanctified. Experience proves that those who are faithful to prayer are preserved from mortal sin, and if by accident they should fall, they rise again promptly. Mental prayer and mortal sin are mutually incompatible. Many Christians recite the Rosary or the Office of our Lady, fast, and yet continue to live in sin ; while he who remains faithful to mental prayer will not only abandon sin, but he will detach his heart from all creatures in order that he may love God alone. Prayer is the furnace in which souls are inflamed by the Divine love” (*Praxis*, 122 and 217).

“I do not know any better means of salvation,” says

¹ Her *Life*, written by herself, translated by David Lewis, chap. viii., pp. 58, 59.

St. John Baptist de Rossi, "than mental prayer. He who goes not to prayer goes after temptation. The day on which we have not made our meditation, let us beware of falling into sin."

The learned Suarez esteemed prayer so highly that he would have preferred to lose all his learning rather than one half hour's converse with God.¹

126. It is unnecessary to multiply quotations. All true servants of God, without exception, profess the same esteem for the exercise of mental prayer, and we cannot sum up the teaching of the Saints better than by saying that prayer gives us true wisdom, and with it every sort of good : *Venerunt mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa, et innumerabilis honestas per manus illius* (Sap. vii. 11). By it all vices are corrected, by it all virtues are acquired.

On the other hand, what can we hope from those who have never reflected, who have never given themselves up to serious consideration ? They are, unhappily, numerous in our days, and we may repeat with too much truth the words of the prophet Jeremy : *Desolatione desolata est terra, qui nemo est qui recogitet corde.*

This is what we must say and repeat. And if it is objected that it is possible to reflect without meditating, let us reply expressly : "No. The moment you pause to dwell upon some serious thought, *that you reflect on some truth of our holy religion*, drawing certain conclusions for your own guidance, you are meditating without knowing it. The meditation that we are proposing to you, and wishing to teach you, is merely this ; but it is at once the surest, easiest, and most fruitful way of making these reflections and drawing these practical conclusions. Unless you apply yourself to this real meditation, you will only have fugitive gleams of truth. The good thoughts which cross your mind will pass without leaving many traces behind ; your resolutions will be without strength, and your life will not correspond fully to your beliefs."

¹ St. Jure, *Connaissance de Jésus Christ*, t. iii., chap. v.

Preachers and confessors cannot, therefore, insist too strongly on the importance of mental prayer. This path will, especially at first, be arid and difficult, and, in order to persevere in it, the mind must be thoroughly penetrated with its great advantages. "Otherwise," says Father Pius de Granada, "the human heart is so attached to itself, hard work is so repugnant to it, that it will never undertake so toilsome a task, unless it sees that it will derive some great profit from it" (*Treatise on Prayer*, Part iii., Prologue).

127. So the director's first aim must be to impress on his penitents a great devotion for prayer, in order to induce them to practise this holy exercise; and at the same time he must inspire them with an intense desire to acquire this habit, and a firm resolution never to abandon it.

St. Teresa makes a great point of this firm resolve of never giving up prayer; she regards it as being of sovereign importance, and states her reasons at great length (*Way of Perfection*, chap. xxiii.).

First, it is our duty to God. Indeed, if we do it for His sake, as we ought; if we devote ourselves to this pious exercise with the aim of giving Him glory, of rendering Him our homage, of learning to love and serve Him better, we ought not to do it by halves, or reserve to ourselves the right of discontinuing it when we may choose. To make this slight effort for God, with the intention of stopping as soon as it became a little burdensome, would indeed be to show an unbecoming ease in our conduct towards our Maker.

Another reason is that when a soul is firmly decided to persevere in the practice of mental prayer "it becomes more difficult for the devil to tempt it. He stands much in fear of constant souls; he knows by experience the harm that they do him; he knows that all his attempts to injure them only turn to their profit and to the profit of others, and that he will be worsted in the combat" (St. Teresa).

Finally, we feel much more confident when we have said, "Whatever happens, I will never give way." The instance

of the conqueror who burnt his ships on landing upon his enemy's shores is classical ; an army firmly resolved to conquer or perish in the attempt is sure of victory.

§ 2. *Definition of Mental Prayer—Its Various Divisions.*

128. Prayer is an uplifting and an application of our minds and hearts to God, in order to pay Him our debts, lay our needs before Him, and so to become holier for His glory.

This definition appears to us to be applicable to the various states of prayer, which differ so widely one from the other, and to suit the lower as well as the highest degrees of contemplation. There are, in fact, very many ways of practising this devotion, and the classification of the various states of this prayer is one of the most complicated questions of ascetic theology.

Father Rodriguez (*On Prayer*, chap. vi., *sub fine*) declares the *common teaching* of the Saints to be that each of the ways—purgative, illuminative, and unitive—corresponds to a special method of prayer. Suarez teaches the same no less expressly.¹ Nothing could be more logical. In fact, the relations of the soul with God and its form of prayer vary according to its interior state. The method of prayer for beginners is different from that suitable to the devout, and this is different, again, from that proper to the perfect.

In the purgative way, the way of struggles and labours, where the soul is still almost exclusively engaged with earthly matters, altogether preoccupied with its temporal interests, and exposed to grave danger of falling into sin, and, on the other hand, is still a novice in spiritual things,

¹ *Exercitium hoc sanctum (oratio mentalis) in omnibus locum habet, at non potest æqualiter in omnibus inveniri, quia non omnes sunt æque dispositi et affecti ; ergo juxta varios status orantium, ita etiam diversi esse debent orandi gradus et modi.* RECTE Igitur illis tribus statibus hominum tres hæ orandi viæ accommodantur (Suarez, *De Devotione*, xi. 3).

it is only by dint of reflections and considerations that it is enabled to free the heart and raise it towards God, and to bring the will to form energetic and holy resolutions. Meditation or *discursive* prayer is therefore proper to this stage.

In the illuminative way, in which, according to the teaching of theologians, the passions have not so much strength, the desire of advancing in virtue is much more lively and the love of God is just beginning to inflame the soul, the considerations will play a much less important part than the heart. We have then the stage of *affective* prayer, the prayer of ardent desires, earnest supplications, and fervent resolutions.¹

Finally, in the unitive way the principal desire of the soul, as St. Thomas says, is less to grow in the love of God than to be united to Him and to enjoy Him.² St. Thomas, in one of his *opuscula*, according to Father Balthazar Alvarez, even blames those spiritual persons who pass their lives in seeking God without ever enjoying Him.³ Besides, these souls, having received much light, are greatly impressed with the majesty and the goodness of God ; considerations tending to persuade them of their duties to Him could only be a burden to them ; they love Him with a tranquil but intense love, which the Divine Spirit Himself pours into

¹ Alexander of Hales with good reason applied to this prayer the definition of Hugh of St. Victor : *Oratio est conversio in Deum PER PIUM ET HUMILEM AFFEC TUM, fide, et spe, et charitate subnixa* (4 part., quæst. 88, memb. 1, art. 1).

² *Ad hoc principaliter intendit ut Deo inhæreat et eo fruatur, et hoc pertinet ad perfectos* (Ad 3). *Perfecti etiam in charitate proficiunt, sed non est ad hoc principalis eorum cura ; sed jam eorum studium circa hoc maxime versata ut Deo inhærent* (St. Thomas, 2, 2, q. 24, a. 9, c.).

³ *De contemplatione sive via unitiva optime intelligitur . . . quod Bernardus dixit . . . "oratio est HOMINIS DEO ADHÆRENTIS affectio, et familiaris quædam et pia allocutio, et STATIO illuminatæ mentis AD FRUENDUM QUAMDIU LICET."* Quæ ultima verba maxime declarant statum animæ quæ ad unionem ascendit, nam illuminata supponitur et IN DEO QUIESCENS ad fruendum illo (Suarez, *De Devotione*, xi. 7).

their hearts, and they taste a deep and lively satisfaction in this love. The method of prayer of these perfect souls will thus be less vehement, at once more simple and more calm : it is *ordinary contemplative prayer*.

But among the perfect there are those to whom God grants marvellous favours, which suppose an actual interference with the ordinary laws of Nature : these are true miracles, like the raptures and ecstasies which suspend the exercise of the sensible faculties ; or, again, God works *purely spiritual phenomena* in their souls without the intermediary of the exterior senses, or even of the imagination, making them thus like the angels or disembodied spirits. Among such phenomena are intellectual visions : this constitutes *extraordinary contemplation*.¹

¹ Cf. Suarez, *De Oratione*, chap. xiv.

"Every one," says Fr. Lallemant, "must keep faithfully to the kind of prayer proper to that state of the spiritual life to which he belongs. There are three kinds. Meditation or discursive prayer is proper to beginners who are in the purgative way ; affective prayer to those who are making progress, and are in the illuminative way ; contemplation and the prayer of union to the perfect who are in the unitive way" (7^e Principe, chap. i.).

Father Surin (*Cat. Spir.*) is not less explicit. "*For whom is discursive prayer ?* For those who begin. *For whom affective prayer ?* For those who advance. *For whom is contemplation ?* For the perfect" (part i., chap. i.). "*How many sorts of contemplation are there ?*" he asks in the following chapter. "There are two principal kinds—the ordinary and the extraordinary. *What is ordinary contemplation ?* It is a simple repose of the soul in which it tastes and experiences Divine things, remaining in the presence of God without any difficulty, and considering heavenly things with affection. *What is extraordinary contemplation ?* It is that which, beyond and above this repose, is accompanied by extraordinary gifts and favours, such as visions, raptures, and ecstasies."

SECTION II.—ON DISCURSIVE PRAYER.

The kind of prayer proper to beginners is, as we said, the prayer of meditation.

§ I. *Definition of Discursive Prayer.*

129. "Discursive prayer," says Father Surin (*Cat. Spir.*, part i., chap. ii.), "is that in which a man tries by various considerations, to understand the mysteries of the faith and instruct himself therein, while drawing resolutions and conclusions for the amendment of his life." "The prayer of meditation," says the Ven. Fr. Libermann, "is a sensible application of the mind to a supernatural truth, in order to convince ourselves of it and to be brought to love it by the help of Divine grace." The considerations as the means, the resolutions as the end; such are the characteristics of this form of prayer. All authors are agreed as to this. All are equally agreed that for beginners a method is almost always necessary. Does not every art, in fact, need an apprenticeship? It is only by the help of a clear, practical, and elementary method that masters can train their pupils. In this way they at first guide and accompany them step by step. Later on the pupil, to whom the routine has now grown familiar, comes to act more spontaneously, and frees himself from the shackles of an over-rigid rule.

This method, as taught by all the masters of the spiritual life, is the same. We may compare that given by St. Peter of Alcantara, that of Father Pius de Granada, that which St. Ignatius follows in the *Spiritual Exercises*, that which St. Francis of Sales teaches in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, and the method taught at St. Sulpice,¹ and we shall see that, if some insist on certain points more than on others, if some details vary, the divergences are small and the basis identical.

¹ See the book of M. Letorneau, Curé of St. Sulpice, *La Méthode d'oraison mentale du Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice*. Paris, Lecoffre.

§ 2. *Method of Discursive Prayer.*

130. (1) *Preparation.*—All the authors begin with the preparation : *Ante orationem præpara animam tuam, et noli esse quasi homo qui tentat Deum*—Before prayer prepare thy soul ; and be not as a man that tempteth God (Ecclus. xviii. 23). The human mind is by no means drawn of itself towards spiritual things ; in most people, and especially beginners, the mind and heart are habitually filled with worldly thoughts, preoccupations, and ideas, so much so that these must be cast out before they can place themselves in dispositions of recollection and prayer. “ Before we play an instrument,” says St. Peter of Alcantara, “ we take care to put it in tune.” This preparation must be very necessary, since the Holy Spirit tells us that to neglect it is to tempt God—that is to say, to expect Him to work a miracle.

“ The preparation,” says St. Francis of Sales, “ consists of two points—to place ourselves in the presence of God, and to ask Him to give us the help of His light ” (*Devout Life*, part ii., chap. ii.). The Saint then points out four methods of placing ourselves in God’s presence. As his book is in everybody’s hands, let us content ourselves with a summary of his teaching. The first method consists in picturing to ourselves the immensity of God, Who is present in every place. The second is to think that not only is God where we are, but that He is in us, in the depths of our souls. . . . A third method is to picture the Son of God in His humanity regarding from on high all men on the earth, but specially Christians, and most particularly those who are actually engaged in prayer. The fourth consists in imagining that Jesus Christ is in the same place with us, as if we saw Him before us, much as we might picture the presence of some friend.

It is good to make use of the imagination in order to place ourselves thus in the presence of God. Indeed, “ the imagination, being pleasantly busied with a supernatural

object, leaves us at peace during our prayer, and helps rather than hinders us ; while when we leave it unoccupied as a rule it gives us trouble " (Libermann, *Écrits*, p. 127).

The invocation comprises three parts. At the sight of God's Majesty man must abase himself before Him, and offer Him his homage. This is the act of adoration. Some methods, notably that of St. Sulpice, rightly supplement it with acts of humility and contrition, by which we confess ourselves to be unworthy to appear before God, or to be permitted to remain in His presence, and ask His pardon for all the infidelities of our life. Having thus confessed our powerlessness to pay Him our homage and address Him as we ought, we implore the light of the Holy Ghost and the assistance of His grace. We then make a short invocation to the Blessed Virgin and to our Guardian Angel.

So much for the preparation. Fr. Libermann tells us that this is a very important part of the prayer of meditation. " If we do not carry out this first point well the whole prayer will suffer " (*Écrits Spirit*, p. 124). Thus, if people complain that they cannot succeed in this holy exercise, we must especially urge them not to make these preparatory acts in a superficial or careless manner, but to apply themselves to it seriously and with their whole attention.

131. *The Body of the Prayer—Exercise of the Three Faculties of the Soul.*—After this comes the body of the prayer, in which we arrive at the subject-matter. It is here specially that the three faculties of the soul are engaged. We recall this theory of St. Ignatius of set design, for we shall never properly understand the authors who followed him—St. John of the Cross, for instance, and still more St. Teresa—if we lose sight of this way of looking at meditation. St. Teresa, even in the highest forms of prayer, always bears in mind the part played by the three faculties of the soul, and her explanations become much clearer when taken in conjunction with this doctrine of St. Ignatius.

These three faculties of the soul are (1) the memory. St. Francis of Sales (chap. iv.), in attributing to the imagination the part which others assign to the memory, speaks, perhaps, with the greater exactitude—at least, his language answers better to our conception of these two faculties. (2) The understanding or reason. (3) The will.

As to this last faculty, it is important that we should never forget, in reading the works of ascetical or mystical writers, that they, like all other theologians, understand this term in its true and wider sense, as signifying the intellectual appetite or faculty by which we turn to the good when we have apprehended it by our reason. Since the seventeenth century the sense of the word has often been restricted and applied to the act of determination alone. The power of loving is now expressed exclusively by the word "heart," which is less exact, for this word nearly always implies a sensible love, which, though it has its seat in the intellectual appetite, yet has its manifestation in the sensitive appetite. We shall use the term "will" in its theological sense.

The memory, or, as we should prefer to say, the imagination, is exercised in placing before the mind's eye the point or mystery which is to form the subject of our prayer; the understanding, in searching out and considering the motives which are the most capable of inflaming the will; and, finally, the will, in producing affections such as praise, thanksgiving, desires, prayers, and resolutions.

132. There is another way of describing the same method, which seems better adapted to the needs of the faithful and easier to remember. It is that of dividing the meditation into five points: preparation, or the presence of God; consideration; the personal application; prayer; and the resolution.

(1) *Preparation*.—We have dealt with this already.

(2) *Consideration*.—Once you have placed yourself in a state of recollection by means of the preparatory exercise, you must strive to conceive in your soul a fervent desire

for spiritual blessings. To this end try to get, first of all, a lively conviction of their importance, and so you will arrive at the second point of mental prayer—*i.e.*, the consideration, or what is properly known as meditation.

How are you to make the consideration? This is, in fact, the difficulty; it is this which many devout souls consider to be above their capacity, and meditation appears an impossibility to them.

For those who can use some good book the difficulty is greatly lessened. You take a volume of meditations, or some other pious work, such as the *Imitation*, the *Devout Life*, the *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*, etc. You read a few sentences, then stop to think them over; you read a little more, and then meditate again.

But reading is not always possible, and, besides, there are certain subjects of special importance for which it is not so necessary, and, indeed, as we must often return to them, we should weary of reading the same pages over and over again.

These subjects are, of course, the great truths of religion. In order to meditate on them without the help of a book, it is good to make use of the imagination to represent to ourselves the circumstances of the mystery or event which we are considering, and this is what St. Ignatius calls the composition of place. If, for example, we meditate on hell, we shall see with the eyes of the imagination those immense fires, and the souls of the reprobate enclosed, as it were, in bodies of fire; we shall listen to their groans, their cries, their clamours, their blasphemies against our Lord, and so on—and thus, with other truths, applying successively, as far as the subject permits, our five senses to the fact on which we are meditating.

Certain writers—Roothaan, for instance (*Sur la manière de Méditer*)—suggest the use of the famous Latin verse which sums up all these different circumstances as a means of recalling them to mind:

Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando.

(Who, what, where, by what means, why, how, when.)

The reader can take some suitable subject for meditation, and see how these different circumstances of subject, object, place, method, end, and time, help to suggest useful reflections.¹

When the imagination has thus passed in review the different circumstances of the event or mystery which we are trying to examine, it remains for the understanding to draw the conclusions, and then to consider the motives best adapted to convince and persuade us. The conclusion to which we must always tend may be summed up thus : we must avoid evil and do good. Now, we may reduce the motives which urge us to accept this truth to these three : (1) It is simple justice. Not only common honesty, but, above all, the respect due to God and gratitude for all His benefits, make it our duty to do so. (2) Nothing is more advantageous for ourselves. It is to our *interest* both for this present life and for the future. (3) The undertaking is easy : so many others succeed in it with the help of Divine grace. We shall readily see the various developments to which each of these motives can lead ; it is good to dwell on them and penetrate deeply into them.

Thus is acquired that keen relish for spiritual things which is, as we have said, the aim of this second part of discursive prayer—namely, the considerations.

133. (3) *The Personal Application.*—In order to desire them yet more ardently, we must consider how great is our need of them. This will bring us to the third part of our prayer—*i.e.*, the personal application. It is a sort of examination of conscience, in which we look our faults in the face, and consider the sins to which we are most

¹ Thus in the meditation on the Passion, the subject, *quis*, is the Son of God ; the object, *quid*, are His sufferings ; the place, *where*, is Calvary, near that Jerusalem which He had so greatly loved ; the methods of his enemies, *quibus auxiliis*, were hypocrisy and calumny ; the cause, *cum*, our own sins ; the mode, *quomodo*, the ignominious death reserved for felons ; the time, *when*, the Paschal season, when strangers and the inhabitants of all Palestine, who had been witnesses of the miracles of Jesus, flocked to Jerusalem.

inclined. We see, by this means, how far we are from having acquired that virtue the necessity of which we have just recognized. This practice is of great importance. "Some people," said St. Vincent of Paul, "have beautiful thoughts and good feelings, but they do not apply them to their own case, and do not make sufficient reflections on their own interior condition, and yet it has often been urged that when God communicates some light or some good impulses in prayer, we should always make them serve our own especial needs. We must consider our own defects, confess them and acknowledge them before God, and take an earnest resolution to correct them.

134. (4) *Petition*.—The fourth part of discursive prayer is the petition. It should be made in the way of colloquy and earnest supplication. The soul, continuing in the presence of God, addresses itself to Him with fervour and confidence ; it should regard Him less as a severe Master than as a benefactor full of compassion, a Father overflowing with affection and goodness, a most tender and devoted Friend. Speaking, then, to Him with a holy freedom, the soul will remind Him of the promises which He has attached to prayer, promises so clear and so consoling.

Petite et accipietis, etc. . . . *quod cum que petieritis*, etc. (Ask and you shall receive . . . all that you ask the Father in My name, etc.). Again, it will confess its own weakness, its incapacity, too often proved by past experience, but it will add : *Domine si vis, potes me mundare* (Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean) ; and again, with St. Paul, "I can do all things through Him Who strengtheneth me."

The soul will declare the purity of its intentions. It is not only for its own personal benefit that it makes these petitions ; it is also for the honour of God, to Whom it will thus be able to render better service and greater glory. Finally, it will appeal to the merits of our Lord, for although it has of itself no right of its own, no claim to urge, as it

must needs humbly confess, yet it may rest with confidence upon the Passion of the Saviour. Why did the Word of God become incarnate, why did He impose upon Himself labours so great, sufferings so cruel, if it were not to merit for us the most precious and the most abundant graces ?

A short colloquy with Mary, our tender mother, with our good Angel, with our holy patron, and the Saints to whom we have a special devotion, will conclude this fourth part.

Let us note well that the petition is the most important part of mental prayer,¹ or, to put it better, real prayer only begins with it. As long as the soul does not turn to God in order to speak to Him, it may, it is true, meditate, but it does not pray, it does not make mental prayer.

Some persons do not understand this, and in the course of a half-hour's exercise spend all their time in reflection without saying anything to God. Even when to their reflections they have added holy desires and generous resolutions, this still does not constitute prayer. Doubtless the mind has not alone been engaged : the heart has been inflamed, it has turned ardently towards the good, but it has not outpoured itself into the heart of God. Such meditations are almost barren : they soon engender fatigue and weariness, and often, also, discouragement, and the relinquishment of this holy exercise.

135. (5) *Resolutions*.—It now only remains to make resolutions. This is the fifth and last point in meditation. By the considerations the mind is illuminated ; the remembrance of God's benefits has engendered confidence and gratitude. In the petitions the heart has become enkindled, its ardent supplications have brought about a sweet intimacy between God and the faithful soul. Acts of love have been produced ; but this love would remain feeble

¹ To the petition praise and thanksgiving may and should be joined, if we reflect on God's greatness and on all His benefits. While with regard to promises, protestations, and offerings, they will accompany the resolutions.

and sterile indeed did it not strengthen itself by means of generous resolutions. He who says, "My God, I love Thee," and who is not willing to give any proof of his love, will be under a delusion. The desire to please God should be the motive of our resolutions ; inspired by love, they will be wiser, stronger, more efficacious, and they will help us to the better performance of this great duty of loving God, which should be the spring of all our actions and the perpetual nourishment of our hearts.

Resolutions should be *special* and *real*. General resolutions, such as that of becoming better, serving God better, or resolutions which are to be carried out in a month or a year, will be useless. They must be particularized and defined. "To-day, in such circumstances, I will practise such a virtue, I will avoid such a bad action." They must be humble and confident ; confidence in God, and the humility which is mistrust of self, must always go together. Finally, they must be *often repeated*. It will be better to come back constantly to certain practical resolutions than to change every minute, and this even when we may have made them frequently without having kept them. "What is the use," people sometimes say, "of resolutions which we do not keep?" The answer is that they serve insensibly to strengthen the will. By dint of saying, "I will," by dint of repeating it, even after falls which are often those of simple weakness, the will becomes firmer, and ends by being really strong. Take no resolutions and you will never correct yourself. Take them constantly, even after failure, and you will end by attaining to the object of your endeavours, and your constancy will be rewarded.¹

136. Now hear the wise words of St. Vincent of Paul. A member of the community, in giving an account of his

¹ "Even if the first resolutions have not been able to strengthen them [*i.e.*, weak souls] at all, the second and third will do so more and more, and at last, by dint of constant resolves, they become resolute" (St. Francis of Sales, *Letters*, vol. vi., p. 406).

prayer, had said that he doubted whether he ought to take resolutions at all, because of his failure to put them into practice. St. Vincent, beginning to speak, and addressing all present, said : "We must not desist from making resolutions whenever we pray on account of our unfaithfulness in fulfilling them, just as we do not cease from taking food although we may seem to get no benefit thereby, for the making of resolutions is one of the most important parts of mental prayer, and we must dwell particularly upon them, and not so much upon the considerations and the colloquy. The chief fruit of mental prayer consists in making good resolutions, making them strongly, establishing them firmly, being thoroughly convinced of their importance, preparing ourselves well to carry them out, and foreseeing obstacles in order to overcome them. This is not all, however, for our resolutions themselves are, after all, nothing but physical and moral actions, and although we do well to form them in our hearts and to confirm ourselves therein, we must none the less recognize that what is good in them (their practice and results), depends absolutely upon God.

" And what do you think to be the most frequent cause of our failing in our resolutions ? It is that we trust to them too much ; we reassure ourselves because of our good desires, we rely on our own strength, and this is why no good results ensue. This is why, having formed some resolutions in mental prayer, we must pray earnestly to God, invoking His grace instantly, with a great mistrust of ourselves, that it may please Him to communicate the necessary grace for the fructification of these resolutions. *And even although we may afterwards fail, not once or twice only, but on several occasions and for a long time, and even although we have not put one of them into execution, we must never, for all that, fail to renew them and to have recourse to God's mercy, and implore the help of His grace. Our past faults should indeed humble us, but not so as to make us lose heart ; and into whatever faults we may fall we must not in*

any way come short of the trust which God desires us to place in Him, but always take a fresh resolution to rise up again and guard against another fall by means of the help of His grace which we must ask of Him. Although physicians may see no results from the remedies which they give to a sick person, they do not consequently cease to continue and repeat them until they see some hope of recovery. If, then, we continue to apply the remedies for bodily sickness, however prolonged and extreme, even when no improvement is visible, how much more should we do the same for the infirmities of our souls, in which, when it so pleases God, grace works the greatest marvels!" "If he who forms holy resolutions," says the *Imitation*, "fails to perform them, how will it be with him who never forms them, or does so but feebly" (Book I., chap. xix.).

When with beginners this prayer leads to solid and serious resolutions, it has been well performed, otherwise it has been defective; resolutions are the decisive mark of good prayer (Libermann, *Écrits*, p. 110). The conclusion of the prayer will be very simple. Thank God briefly for having vouchsafed you His grace, ask His blessing, and "conclude with the *Pater* and *Ave*, which are the prayers common to and necessary for all the faithful" (*The Devout Life*).

137. Such, in our opinion, is the system to be laid down for beginners. This methodical progress seems to us to be very desirable. Everything is connected, and has a logical sequence, and for this reason is easy to remember.

Mental prayer, as thus set forth, cannot seem unattainable. Let us make those who complain of their inability to meditate look fairly at the divers points of this exercise in succession, and let us show them that each is within their power, and say, "What is there so difficult in this? To put yourself in God's presence? But you do it often; you have to do it at the least every time that you pray, even vocally. The considerations? But with a book it is child's play, and even without a book nothing can be

easier than to represent, for instance, Death or the Judgment, or the Passion of our Lord ; nothing easier than to draw conclusions which detach themselves of their own accord from the great truths, all the more because there is no necessity to dwell long on these reflections. Is it the personal application which alarms you ? But you constantly make your examination of conscience, and the personal application is still simpler. You cannot say that it is the petitions which seem impracticable to you. I like to think, on the contrary, that you constantly address yourself in this way to our Lord, and are not reduced, like children, always to resort to formulas which you have by heart in order to speak to Him. To take resolutions, to consider beforehand how you are to keep them, and to guard against obstacles, these are not difficult things, either. Admit with a good grace, then, that your negligence with regard to such a salutary exercise proceeds, not from incapacity, but from a want of courage."

§ 3. *Practical Ways of leading Souls to Meditation.*

138. Suarez, in his *De Devotione*, chap. iv., No. 9, teaches that meditation is desirable for all the faithful, whatever their state of life, and that it ought to be suggested to every one as a necessary means of perfection. St. Vincent of Paul thought that persons of all conditions could practise meditation (*Life* by Abelly, Book III., chap. vii.). Even young people of thirteen and fourteen are capable of it. Only let them be carefully instructed in the proper method, giving them a table setting forth the necessary processes,¹ and sometimes, if possible, carrying out the exercise before them—above all, exhorting them thereto earnestly, encouraging them, and constantly asking them to give an account of their faithfulness in meditation ; thus solid and satisfactory results will be obtained.

We must, however, know how to insist without being

¹ We subjoin in the Appendix a table for this purpose.

importunate, proceeding rather by way of encouragement than reproof. If, for example, we are questioning a penitent on his faithfulness in prayer, and receive unsatisfactory replies, we should simply say : " Well, this time you will be more faithful, for you see I am not discouraged, feeling sure that sooner or later I shall get you to be very exact in this duty."

The strongest and most embarrassing objection is that of lack of leisure. But even this, St. Alphonsus tells us, ought not to stop the confessor. He must still require the penitent to apply himself to meditation, choosing the quietest moments in the day—even his working hours, if he cannot manage anything else (*Praxis*, 123).

Many occupations, in fact, are not so absorbing that we are unable, while attending to them, to make the various acts of meditation. If inevitable distractions result, God, having regard to the good-will, will by His more powerful graces supply what is lacking in the direction of exterior circumstances.

139. Those who hear Mass, and are then immediately obliged to attend to their occupations, may perfectly accomplish the essential acts of this prayer while assisting at the holy sacrifice. At the beginning of Mass they will make the preparatory exercise—presence of God, adoration, contrition, and invocation.

During Mass they will reflect on our Saviour immolating Himself for us. They will then meditate on one or other of the four ends of the sacrifice—adoration, thanksgiving, impetration, and expiation. Or they will recall our Lord's Passion, of which the Mass is the memorial, or even, according to circumstances, some other subject.

Then they will acknowledge all their sinfulness before God. *Domine, non sum dignus* (My God, I am but weakness and unworthiness). In these dispositions of humility they will make a spiritual Communion.

After the priest's Communion they will lay their requests before God with the more confidence that they are quite

close to Jesus, and that they can put their finger, so to speak, upon His mercy and goodness. Is there any occasion where the benign compassion of our dear Saviour appears more clearly than upon the altar? Finally, they will not leave their God without renewing their resolutions and assuring Him of their entire good-will and lively desire to please Him.

140. It might be well, also, if one despaired of obtaining more, to impose a form of examination of conscience which would, up to a certain point, take the place of meditation. Such is the excellent method proposed by St. Ignatius (*Spiritual Exercises*, first week), which comprises all the essential parts of this prayer. This exercise should, according to the Saint, contain five parts: (1) Calling to mind God's benefits; (2) invocation—asking Him for light and dispositions of contrition and hatred of sin; (3) examination of conscience, properly so called; (4) fervent prayer for pardon; (5) resolutions and good intentions.

There can be no obstacle to thus putting oneself in God's presence, making in the *first* place the invocation which St. Ignatius gives for the *second*. The recollection of all God's benefits will come next, or else some other consideration, equally fitted as a preparation for the act of contrition—for example, calling to mind God's tribunal, the Supreme Judge, or the thought of heaven, purgatory, and so on. As for the petition, or mental prayer properly so called, after the examination the penitent must be directed never to omit to persevere in it seriously, and to call upon God to bless his resolutions.

We should thus have a methodical meditation such as we have described, and directors might advise this, and even order it, without calling it by its name. For there are persons who are terrified at the word "meditation," and cannot believe themselves to be capable of this exercise. We must therefore lead them, without their suspecting it, to the performance of these acts. It is thus that by concealing them in things that they like, little children are got

to take remedies which they would reject if they were warned beforehand of their presence.

141. Others make use of spiritual reading for the same end. They will recommend that this should be preceded by the exercise of the presence of God ; the reading should be performed slowly, pausing from time to time in order that the truths which are encountered may penetrate, and then the personal application will be made. Finally, the penitent will be advised to combine this with the offering of fervent petitions concluding by making sincere promises to God. The method is the same, and under the name of spiritual reading it is really mental prayer which is obtained.

Dwelling upon the mysteries of the Rosary will also serve the same purpose. This is obligatory if the numberless indulgences granted to the confraternity are to be gained, and if the faithful can be induced to do this it is a step in the direction of meditation. St. Teresa (*Way of Perfection*, chap. xxvi.) recommends a mode of prayer intended to replace meditation with those who are incapable of giving their minds to this exercise. We will speak of it when we come to deal with Affective Prayer (Part III.), under which heading the kind of prayer described by the Saint must be classed.

The director will require his penitents to place themselves in God's presence at the beginning of their vocal prayers. He will afterwards lead them the more easily to mental prayer. And would it not be well, from the same motive, to advise this practice before any spiritual reading that he may impose ?

And, finally, the mode of prayer taught by St. Ignatius (which consists in reciting, piece by piece, some vocal prayer, such as the *Pater*, so to speak tasting, and even meditating, on each word, each sentence) may also, if need be, serve as a substitute for ordinary mental prayer.

§ 4. Subjects, Place, Posture, Time, Length of the Meditation.

Let us now say a few words on the conditions under which the meditations should be made—the subjects, place, time, and the duration suitable for this holy exercise.

142. *Subjects*.—First of all the subjects. There are, says Louis of Granada (*On Prayer*, part i., chap. i., § 9), no better or more efficacious subjects for meditation than those which we take from the principal articles and mysteries of our Faith, such as the Passion and Death of our Saviour, the Judgment, Hell, Paradise, God's gifts, and similarly the recollection of our sins, our life, and death. Each of these, well weighed and considered, is very effectual for leading our hearts and affections to the love and fear of God, to a horror of sin, and a contempt for the world.

St. Ignatius follows this system in his book of the *Spiritual Exercises*. This work (where even the most advanced may find salutary lessons) addresses itself specially to sincere but imperfect Christians, faithful souls inspired by right sentiments, but feeble and inconstant, and no other work shows better, or indeed as well, the way by which the complete conversion of this class may be attempted. For it is by a profound consideration of great truths that the saintly and illustrious author endeavours to win their hearts, and to attach them irrevocably and unreservedly to the service of God.

Experience confirms the unanimous teaching of the masters, and proves that we must first of all probe these great truths, returning to them constantly at the outset of the spiritual life, penetrating ourselves with them, under penalty of building our houses on the sand and raising but a fragile edifice. The other mysteries of our Lord's life and the teachings of the Gospel also supply material for these pious meditations. This matter is abundant, and we may even say inexhaustible. The different virtues and the duties of our state are also excellent subjects.

But whatever be the topic chosen, let us never forget to reflect on God's goodness and His love for us. The evidences of His love are everywhere, and the Christian soul cannot devote too much care towards discovering them and searching into them. Of course, we can never really know the Sacred Heart of Jesus, nor comprehend all the depth, power, and extent of His love; but the truer our conception of it, the more lively will be our desire to love Him, the more resolutely determined shall we be to give Him back love for love.

143. Place.¹—Mental prayer can be made everywhere,² but in order to avoid distractions it is best to choose a solitary and secluded place. “But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father in secret” (Matt. vi. 6). God's house is also referred to in the Gospels as “the place of prayer”—*Domus mea domus orationis est* (Luke xix. 46)—and our churches, even more than the Temple of the Old Law, favour recollection and fervour, for Jesus dwells there, and from out the Tabernacle proceeds the Divine effluence by which faith is rekindled and love inflamed.

144. Posture.—In order to pray better the posture should be humble and recollected—the exterior attitude contributes to the good dispositions of the soul. Too much seeking after ease must be avoided, but the body should not be overtaxed. If we give ourselves up to softness the mind will be more liable to distractions, but the attention would be equally diverted were we to set our minds upon making the body suffer. To do so for a few minutes, to maintain a fatiguing position in order to conquer nature, is an excellent practice which helps us to get the better of distractions. But such a course over-prolonged might become a source of preoccupation, and be consequently harmful.

145. Time.—This prayer may be made at all hours of

¹ Cf. Suarez, *De Devotione*, cap. viii.

² *Volo viros orare in omni loco* (1 Tim. ii. 8).

the day, but the Doctors agree that the morning is the most suitable time. The body is then more free, distractions are fewer, and the prayer exercises a happy influence upon the whole day. The Holy Scriptures refer especially to the morning as the hour of prayer.

146. *Duration.*—What should be the duration of this prayer? St. Teresa is commonly credited with the saying : “ Pray for a quarter of an hour daily and your salvation is assured.” But nowhere in any of her writings have we found any such words. The Doctors and Saints all require a longer period, and for this St. Peter of Alcantara gives an excellent reason. “ If the time is too short it is all spent in ridding the mind of distractions and regulating the heart, and by the time that we are ready, and should have begun the exercise, we have to leave it. It is with good reason, then, we advise that the longest possible time should be given to this prayer, and it would be better to devote a considerable time to it once a day rather than a shorter period twice ” (*On Prayer*, chap. xii.).

Those writing especially for religious stipulate for an hour and a half or two hours.¹ Thus, Louis of Granada (part i., chap. xi.), St. Peter of Alcantara (*loc. cit.*), St. Teresa (*Life*, chap. viii.), St. Francis of Sales (who is thinking chiefly of those who are living in the world, and are given principally to the active life), fix the time at one hour (*Devout Life*, part ii., chap. i.). He began, however, by requiring only half or three-quarters of an hour, as his letters prove. St. Alphonsus wishes the time to be gradually increased as fervour augments, but that only half an hour should be exacted at first.

For those who declare that they can only give a quarter of an hour to this exercise would it not be better to advise them to devote the quarter of an hour exclusively to mental prayer, and then continue it while at work, so that the

¹ They allow, however, this modification, that if the prayer follows any other devotional exercise, or if the hour is one where recollection is easily attained, the time may be curtailed.

proper time may, after all, be secured. A quarter of an hour's meditation would, doubtless, be better than nothing, but the effects of such a short prayer would be so slight, the soul would derive so little fruit, and especially so little consolation, that it would never become attached to it, and would not long continue faithful to this holy exercise.

147. *Continuity of Mental Prayer.*¹—Is it a fault to interrupt one's mental prayer? In itself no, if the interruption is for a good reason and a motive which is respectful to God. But as these interruptions, even when involuntary, are always harmful to the soul, and because the cause must often be attributed to the Evil One, they should be carefully avoided.

Besides, these interruptions are often slightly culpable, because they arise from negligence and frivolity of mind. They are for the same reason disrespectful toward God, and are opposed to our spiritual good. And this is true also of interruptions in vocal prayer.

148. *Distractions.*—Christians giving themselves to mental prayer are often prevented from perseverance by the distractions which they experience. They think that it is time lost, and that meditation in their case is an absolutely useless exercise. They find it, in fact, hard to accept the truth of the teaching that when distractions are involuntary they in no way affect the value of the prayer. God requires of us our good-will only, and not success, and in His eyes a prayer full of involuntary distractions has as much worth as if it had been quite free from them. Upon the soul itself these distressing but guiltless distractions may have the most salutary effect; they oblige it to carry out a highly meritorious conflict, and lead it to act in a more disinterested manner, persevering in this struggle with itself, not because of the consolations which are denied it, but in the pure spirit of duty and attachment to God.

149. That a distraction should be really involuntary

¹ Suarez, *De Devotione*, cap. v.

three elements are necessary (*Suarez, loc. cit.*) : (1) That we should have begun with the fixed intention not to yield to any distraction ; (2) that we should repel them so soon as they are perceived, otherwise we should revoke our first intention ; (3) that we prepare ourselves before beginning to pray in such a way that we cut off all occasions for wandering thoughts. Again, distractions must be combated without too much intensity of thought. "If," says St. Peter of Alcantara, "attention and recollection of heart are absolutely necessary, the attention must none the less be quiet and moderate, otherwise it will be harmful to the health, and will become an obstacle to devotion. Some persons tire their minds by excessive efforts to attend to the subject of their meditation ; others, that they may escape this difficulty, remain slack, idle, and ready to be carried away by every wind that blows. We must avoid these two extremes, and take the middle course. . . . even as the rider of a vicious horse must hold the reins firmly—that is to say, neither too tight nor too loose, in order that he may neither jib nor gallop at a dangerous pace."

THE ILLUMINATIVE LIFE

PRELIMINARY NOTE

150. By the illuminative life we mean the condition of souls already advanced in excellence, who easily avoid mortal sins, labour sincerely after progress, but who are still weak with regard to venial sin, into which they frequently fall. Having much less to fear from the passions which may perhaps have hitherto dominated him, the Christian now strives to fan within his heart the flame of holy charity, and thus to become more habituated to, and more established in, the practice of the Christian virtues. *Proficientes ad hoc principaliter intendunt ut in eis charitas per augmentum robonetus* (St. Thomas, 2, 2, q. 24, a. 9).

Many souls, says Suarez, continue all their lives in this condition. It is, for that matter, a precious and extremely meritorious state, although still very far removed from perfection. The majority of ascetic books (*The Imitation*, *Devout Life*, St. Vincent Ferrer's *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, Rodriguez on *Christian Perfection*, etc.) suppose that this degree of the Christian life has already been arrived at. The consolations and counsels which they contain are, in fact, addressed to such souls as are already resolved to strive after perfection; while in the states which we have previously described the wish to be saved and to lead the life of a good Christian indeed exists, but the desire for progress is either absent (the first degree), or is still feeble and only intermittently apparent (the second degree). When anyone shows a taste for reading such writings it probably signifies attainment, at least, to the illuminative life.

BOOK III

THIRD DEGREE—DEVOUT SOULS

PART I.—THE PHASES OF PIETY

CHAPTER I

HOW THE SOUL ATTAINS TO THE ILLUMINATIVE LIFE

§ I. *Sensible Consolations.*

151. JUST as some years must elapse before man passes from infancy to the vigour of youth, so the Christian does not arrive all at once at that hearty and lasting resolution of giving himself seriously to the service of God, and this is a disposition which marks the youth of the spiritual life.

“The ancient Fathers,” says St. Dorotheus, “held as an unchangeable maxim that whatever the spirit does not joyfully embrace cannot be of long duration. While the practice of piety has no great charm for the soul, it may indeed produce devout acts from time to time, it may even make laudable and painful efforts, but, in accordance with the axiom ‘that which is violent cannot endure,’ it will lack constancy, and periods of indifference will succeed to the moments of devotion.”

How, then, can the soul be brought to tread steadily in the path of piety? By means of the sensible consolations which will be vouchsafed to it.

We have, in fact, said (No. 76) that some Christians, after seeming to be stationary in the lowest degree for a long time, suddenly appear to be strongly affected by grace. They acquire a taste for religious practices ; they feel a greater attraction for God's service ; prayer, and the frequentation of the Sacraments, become full of charm to them. It is as though the spirit has received new enlightenment and a more lively understanding of the truths of Christianity. Above all, the heart is touched, and is able far better than before to enjoy the consolations of devotion.

152. To some this compassionate gift of God is made at the very beginning of conversion ; to others it comes in youth, when the reason is sufficiently developed. More often, however, the soul experiences this infusion of grace, which is so salutary and so useful for its advancement, when it has served God faithfully, though without much ardour, for some time.

But this favour of God may come when His servant has done nothing unusual, and in such a case it is often on the occasion of some exterior event that this happy change takes place—a mission, a Lenten conference, a retreat, or a pilgrimage. At other times (and we think more frequently) it will come as a reward for some rather more generous exertions than usual. According to St. Teresa, it is by perseverance in well-doing and victory in the fight that the doors of these third Mansions are thrown open to us. The soul, then, has already given proof of a certain fidelity, when God, in order to assist its weakness, which is still so great, communicates to it His powerful graces, full of sweetness and delight.

"When we first begin to give ourselves to God," says Father Grou, "He treats us very gently, in order that He may gain our affections. He fills the soul with peace and ineffable joy. He causes us to take delight in retreats, recollection, and pious exercises. He makes the practice of virtue easy for us. Nothing seems a sacrifice. We

believe ourselves to be capable of everything" (*Manual of Interior Souls*).

"We are to keep in mind," says St. John of the Cross, "that a soul, when seriously converted to the service of God, is in general spiritually nursed and caressed, as an infant by its loving mother, who warms it in her bosom, nourishes it with her own sweet milk, feeds it with tender and delicate food, carries it in her arms, and fondles it. But as the child grows up the mother withdraws her caresses, hides her breasts, and anoints them with the juice of bitter aloes. She carries the infant in her arms no longer, but makes it walk on the ground, so that, losing the habits of an infant, it may apply itself to greater and more substantial pursuits. The grace of God, like a loving mother, as soon as the soul is regenerated in the new fire and fervour of His service, treats it in the same way; for it enables it, without labour on its own part, to find its spiritual milk, sweet and delicious, in all the things of God, and in devotional exercises great sweetness, God giving it the breasts of His own tender love, as to a tender babe. Such souls, therefore, delight to spend many hours, and perhaps whole nights, in prayer. Their pleasures are penances, their joy is fasting, and their consolations lie in the use of the Sacraments and in speaking of Divine things."¹

And while these spiritual delights develop a lively attraction for piety in the soul, they breed a distaste for the vanities and pleasures of the world. "I am not astonished, my dear cousin," wrote St. Francis of Sales, "if God, while giving you a delight in His presence, makes the world, little by little, distasteful to you. Doubtless, my daughter, nothing makes aloes seem so bitter as feeding on honey. When we taste the joys of Divine things, the things of this world can no longer attract us" (*Letter 885*).

In another place the holy Doctor says: "These are the sweetmeats which God gives as baits to His little children,

¹ *The Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. i.

the cordial waters with which He comforts them, and sometimes, also, they are the pledges of the eternal reward " (*Devout Life*, part iv., chap. xiii.).

§ 2. *The Nature of these Spiritual Delights.*

153. For dealing with this question we must resort to a little psychology, and briefly recall the philosophical principles upon which the distinction between the faculties of the soul is based. There are two kinds of beings which present themselves to the soul—those that are sensible and those that are purely spiritual. The first are perceived either by the external senses (sight, hearing, taste, etc.) or by the imagination, which is also a sense—a little more interior than the others, but really equally sensual, since, after all, that which enters into it always takes a bodily form" (*Bossuet, Instruction on the States of Prayer*, Book V.). Spiritual things are perceived by the intellect or the reason. It is by the intellect that we know the world of spirits—God, the angels, and the human soul. By the intellect we discover the moral qualities of our fellow-men ; by reason we perceive the advantages of such and such a course of action.

154. To the two kinds of knowledge furnished by the senses and the reason, correspond certain movements of the soul which are called *passions* in philosophic language and *feelings* in ordinary speech. Accordingly, when we perceive a good or agreeable object, we instinctively feel towards it a movement of attraction. If the object is bad or repugnant, the movement is one of repulsion. If we possess the beloved object, we feel joy ; if it is taken away from us, it is then sorrow that we experience.

We call the faculty which produces these different feelings the appetite, or the appetitive faculty. The word properly indicates the movement of love or inclination towards the good perceived, either by the senses or the intellect, because this is the primary movement, the one from which the

others all proceed. "The other passions," says Bossuet, "have their origin in love alone, which includes all and excites all. Hatred of one object proceeds only from the love which is felt for another. I hate sickness merely because I love health; I feel an aversion for this man only because he puts an obstacle in the way of my possessing what I love. For desire is merely love yearning after the good which we possess not, just as joy is only love attaching to that which we possess. Shunning society and melancholy are love fleeing from that evil by which it is deprived of its good, and love which is afflicted by the deprivation. Boldness is love which will undertake the most difficult tasks in order to possess itself of the beloved object, and fear is love which sees itself threatened with the loss of its desire and is troubled. Hope is love which flatters itself that it will soon possess its prize, and despair is love disconsolate because it has lost what it ever seeks for, and therefore suffers from a despondency which it cannot shake off. Anger is love up in arms at the prospect of losing its treasure, and striving to defend it. In a word, take away love, and there are no passions; instal it, and you give them all birth" (*The Knowledge of God and of Oneself*, i. 6).

These passions will be sensible if their object is sensible, such as the emotions produced by the sight or by the imaginative representation of whatever excites sensuality. These sensible emotions suppose the union of the soul and the body, and it is each of these, or, rather, the human being composed of both, which is then moved. We possess them in common with the animals.

The faculty which is the seat of these sensible emotions is called by philosophers the sensitive appetite.

155. Spiritual objects perceived with the intellect by the aid of ideas, or by reasoning, produce similar movements in the soul. These are either spontaneous (*motus primoprimi*) or deliberate. The movements of love, desire, fear, satisfaction, and regret, are amongst them. So, if

we suggest a difficult problem to a mathematician, he wishes to find the solution to it. This spontaneous desire, once accepted and consented to, becomes the determination to find it. When the solution is discovered, a feeling of satisfaction is produced in the soul. The faculty which pursues or rejects this good or this evil when recognized by the aid of the intellect, and which rejoices at it or is grieved, is called by philosophers the intellectual appetite or the will. It exists in the soul, and not in the body, and is found not only in man, but in such purely spiritual beings as the angels and the devils.

The movements of this faculty—love, desire, volitions, regrets, etc.—being wholly spiritual, are not perceived by the senses. When they occur, however, the body is often conscious of emotions which are wrongly confounded with purely spiritual feelings. It will not be amiss to go into this point more fully.

156. Taken individually, the two appetites are quite distinct. In animals we find only the sensitive appetite, in angels the intellectual appetite; but in man they are so closely interwoven that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the action of the individual appetite. The chief cause of this intimate connection is that the same circumstance usually acts simultaneously upon the senses and the intellect. The husband may love his wife both because of the outward beauty which charms him and the moral qualities that he sees in her, such as kindness, devotion, wit, and prudence. This husband's affection will be at once sensible and spiritual. His wife's presence will cause him at one and the same time sensible joy and intelligent satisfaction. In her absence his imagination will depict the object of his affection, far away from him, and he will experience a feeling of sensible sadness, while the consideration of the services of which he will be deprived will also cause him regret.

Obviously, in this case both appetites are affected simultaneously. It is just the same with those æsthetic emo-

tions where the intellect grasps the ideal under sensible forms. So before a beautiful spectacle, a sweet melody, or the canvas of a great master, a man is deeply moved both in his intellectual and in his sensible being. Further, even when the object is purely spiritual, the emotions which it excites, and which should also be purely spiritual, often take possession of the sensitive appetite, and this then experiences sensible emotions corresponding to those of the will. For example, when the soul is pleased at the news of some happy occurrence, or the success of some enterprise, the heart expands ; when it is troubled, meets with some obstacle, or, again, feels regret for some past fault, it contracts. This connection is, nevertheless, not essential ; the intellectual appetite may be affected without any corresponding action of the sensitive appetite. Sometimes contrition is very intense in a soul which is given over to dryness, and sorrows to find itself so unfeeling.

157. This point settled, we say : These are the sensible delights which God employs in order to move souls newly given over to His service, and to establish their feet in the ways of devotion. These sweetneses, which are often called spiritual consolations¹ (*Memor fui judiciorum tuorum Domine et consolatus sum*),² and which theologians also call

¹ St. Teresa calls them "the contentments," *los contentos* (*Interior Castle*, Fourth Mansion, chap. i.).

² The word "consolation" has been used for a long time by ascetic writers. Holy Scripture, the Fathers, and the *Imitation* have all employed it. But St. Ignatius seems to have formulated its exact meaning. "I call consolation," he says, "an interior movement which is excited in the soul, and by which it commences to burn with love for its Creator. . . . Consolation, again, opens that fountain of tears by which the soul, moved with sorrow for its sins, the Passion of Jesus Christ, or any other consideration concerning His service and His praise, is borne on to the love of its Creator. In fact, I mean by consolation every increase of hope, faith, and charity, and every interior joy which calls and attracts the soul to heavenly things and the care of its salvation, calming and pacifying it in its Creator and Lord" (*Spiritual Exercises*, "Discernment of Spirits," third rule).

accidental devotion,¹ suppose, it is true, the action of the spiritual faculties, as do also the æsthetic emotions of which we have been speaking. But the part played by the sensible faculties is so great, and the soul is so actively impressed by the joys which take possession of the sensitive appetite, that, ordinarily speaking, we pass over the share taken by the understanding, and call these phenomena the sensible operations of grace. Such are the emotions produced either by an imaginative representation of holy things, such as the Birth and Passion of our Lord, Heaven, the Judgment, or by exterior objects or actions—ceremonies, gorgeous services, music, images, and pictures.

“God in His infinite mercy,” says the Ven. Fr. Libermann, “deals with this soul according to the weakness of its nature, and through the side by which it is attracted to Him. It is completely given over to the senses, accustomed to receive its impressions by the senses, to judge, love, and act by the senses, and it lives by the senses only. Seeing it in this condition, and desiring to attract it to a life of holiness, the Divine grace operates necessarily on the interior senses, making it perceive God and Divine things by the aid of the imagination, acting on the senses (the sensitive appetite), and giving the soul a sensible impulsion towards God.² And as the enjoyment is great, so also is the violence of the impassioned movement which leads to it. . . .” (*Spiritual Writings*, p. 408).

“God disposes the sensible faculties so that they lend themselves to His merciful designs by way of sweetness, enjoyment, and satisfaction. These starved faculties, which have been filled with the corruptions of the creature, begin to see that in God alone their true good lies. They begin to break with the creature, and learn to seek refuge in God. This purifies them from the carnal desire for the creature. They are content; they enjoy God; they love

¹ Cf. Suarez, *De Devotione*, vi. 18, 19.

² Cf. St. John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, i., ii., chap. xvii.

to take their pleasure in Him only" (*Spiritual Writings*, p. 226).

158. Man's sensible faculties are thus subjected to the workings of grace. In the imperfect, who habitually allow themselves to be led by the least noble portion of their being (the sensible part), these are the dominant faculties. This is so true that even their spiritual defects, such as pride, usually clothe themselves with sensible forms, the imagination¹ and the sensitive appetite playing as great a part in these defects as do the intellectual faculties. It would be seemingly impossible, therefore, or, at least, little conformable with the ordinary course of things, to bring these imperfect natures under the yoke of grace by considerations of pure reason and by attractions communicated to the will independently of the sensitive appetite. The reaction of the sensible faculties would be too great were not they themselves first entirely captivated by the delights vouchsafed to them by God.

159. These spiritual consolations are not unknown even in the inferior degrees of the purgative life. There are circumstances in which the senses are so deeply affected that few Christian souls remain cold and unmoved—for example, a first Communion day, and those touching solemnities of Catholic worship, processions of the Blessed Sacrament, some unusual ceremonial, missions, or feasts, or those great religious pilgrimages where faith is so wonderfully manifested. In all of these cases the emotion may be lively and consolations abundant. Even souls in

¹ By the word "imagination" is frequently meant that activity of the spirit which draws up plans, makes combinations, calculates or dreams, counts upon or prepares the future. That, doubtless, is the product of several faculties, but the imagination—we use the word in its philosophic sense—plays a great part therein. How many images and pictures does it not cause to pass before the eyes of the soul? If we appear to attribute all these devices or dreams to the imagination alone, it is because it has the most important share in them. It is the imagination which draws away and seduces the reason, of whose errors it is nearly always the cause.

a state of sin are sometimes deeply moved by these spectacles, and carry away a very salutary impression. But apart from such occasions beginners are little favoured by these inward delights. They enjoy a certain peace, they experience a certain satisfaction at some duty fulfilled, which keeps up their fidelity and helps to maintain them in their state ; but these are by no means the sweet joys of which we speak, and which the more advanced souls experience in the ordinary exercise of their Christian duties.

160. The moment when this operation of grace takes place is an important one in the history of the spiritual life, and it would be a serious misfortune if the director failed to take note of the occurrence ; for he would then be unable to further it, and the effect would be greatly impaired. It is rare, moreover, for those under direction to make known their lively and sweet emotions of their own accord. An attentive and watchful director will nevertheless be able to recognize them by certain signs, or, at any rate, be led to suspect their presence ; and then it will be easy for him, by a few questions, to change his suspicions to a certainty. He will perceive that a soul has suddenly become more regular in frequenting the Sacraments, more eager to receive the Holy Eucharist, more capable of surmounting obstacles which had hitherto kept it away from Communion. It will show greater assiduity at prayer and devotional exercises, less human respect, and a clearer and more tender conscience, while at the same time the desire for advancement expresses itself by obvious efforts and requests for counsel, etc. Another sign of sensible grace is the taste which a soul discovers for reading spiritual writings and hearing sermons. Everything which speaks to it of God moves and delights it. Again, if formerly it has been guilty of serious disorders, the spiritual father will discern in it a lively sorrow for its former faults, and a serious desire of making reparation for them. Less advanced souls, and those not favoured with these sensible graces, are indeed sincerely resolved

not to fall back into their old errors ; but they do not experience these lively sentiments of repentance. They scarcely remember their sins, and do not grieve for them very deeply.

By these different marks the director will recognize the interior workings of the Spirit of God, and often by these same signs he can judge whether the Divine action is more or less intense. In fact, these sweetneses, these pleasant emotions which take possession of the heart, and win it over to the service of God, vary in duration and intensity in different subjects.

God, the Master of His own gifts, can grant them more or less lavishly according to His good pleasure. On the other hand, the action of grace may be favoured by a more perfect fidelity, a profounder recollection, a more prayerful spirit, and one of closer union to God. The impression will then be active and lasting, and may endure throughout a whole day. On the other hand, by half-heartedness, a tendency to levity, or an inconstancy in well-doing, the soul can partially obstruct the workings of grace, and the effects will then be less perceptible and the progress slower.

§ 3. *Duration of this State of Delights.*

161. This much to be desired condition, in which the sensible faculties are purified and detached from their vicious tendencies by spiritual delights, is far from being identical in every soul. We have just seen how with some it is a powerful current, while with others it is weaker. Let us add that this happy state is at times much prolonged, and at others, again, it is of very short duration.

Young priests and novices who are really good and regular, usually remain under this influence during the first portion of their seminary life or novitiate,¹ and some even

¹ " Persons who have withdrawn from the world are liable to the trial of which we speak—this aridity of the obscure night—sooner than others," says St. John of the Cross, " and continually from their entrance into the interior life. . . . Very little time

longer. Not, indeed, that they are exempt during this period from all conflicts. In this life a certain alternation of joys and sorrows, of strife and repose, is always present. But, generally speaking, their trials are light, the practice of virtue is powerfully facilitated by the consolations which it affords, and if the repression of their faults costs them something, it is very little, so strongly are they urged thereto by grace. *Satis suaviter equitat, quem gratia Dei portat.*¹

162. During this period of spiritual youth consolations are usually the reward of fidelity to graces already received. On the other hand, the diminution of these sensible delights is often the result of inconstancy, a lesson given by God to teach us to watch over ourselves more carefully, and to be more generous in self-denial.² This trial, however, like those which come later, may have as its aim the confirmation of the beginner in piety by the greater efforts which he is then constrained to make. In this case it is not continuous, and timely intervals of rest and sweetness soon come to sustain his weakness and rekindle his ardour.

When the soul is truly faithful and recollected, when it applies itself bravely to the practice of humility and mortification, as also when it lovingly accepts the troubles which are permitted to it by the mercy of Divine Providence, it then obtains from God abundant and prolonged consolation, and soon enters into the state of fervour. Later on, when treating of the fourth degree of the spiritual life, we

elapses before they enter into this night and fall into dryness (*Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. viii.). But we must add that before they leave the world the majority of these souls have already experienced great spiritual consolations, and in this abundance of sensible graces have nearly always found strength to overcome the difficulties which the world and the devil oppose to their vocation.

¹ He advances easily and joyfully whom the grace of God upholds.

² Cf. St. Ignatius, *Exercises*, "Discernment of Spirits," first week, ninth rule.

shall show the path which it then follows. For the present, we are concerned with those who do not rise to such heights of perfection, and who remain in what we will call the state of simple piety.

Christians of the third degree, then, are either those who are still in the effervescence of a budding piety, or those who, after a long sojourn in the state of simple piety, have not responded sufficiently generously to the calls of grace to merit being raised to a higher rung on the ladder of sanctity.

CHAPTER II

BUDDING PIETY

§ I. Fruits produced in the Soul by Sensible Consolations.

163. BEFORE proceeding to describe the work of grace and its method of operation, we will show the result of this state of sensible delight and enjoyment upon a Christian heart.

“To return to what I began to say,” says St. Teresa, “about the souls which have entered the third mansion, God has shown them no small favour, but a very great one, in enabling them to pass through the first difficulties. Through God’s goodness I believe there are many such people in the world. They are very desirous not to offend His Majesty even by venial sins ; they love penance, and spend hours in meditation ; they employ their time well, exercise themselves in works of charity to their neighbours, are well ordered in their conversation and dress, and those who own a household govern it well. This is certainly to be desired, and there appears no reason to forbid them entrance to the last mansions. Nor will our Lord deny it them if they desire it, for this is the right disposition for receiving all His favours.”¹

¹ *Third Mansion*, chap. i.

This is indeed the portrait of the devout soul. Thank God that now, as in the days of St. Teresa, there are many such in the world. Doubtless, as we shall soon show, they are far from being without defects, but they are nevertheless the life of the Church, the support of good works, the instruments which God often uses to bring back sinners and to strengthen the weak. Strongly attached to God's cause, these devout Christians feel a great aversion for the enemies of the Church. Their faith is much stronger and more enlightened than in the lower degrees. If, unfortunately, they fall, they are deeply conscious of the gravity of their faults, and their remorse is bitter. They understand God's love for them, and not by a reasonable affection only, but with sentiments of filial tenderness, their hearts go out towards Him.

164. Who has not encountered numbers of Christian souls in these excellent dispositions? Yes, we repeat it: dispositions so little natural presuppose a quite extraordinary action of grace, not only upon the intellect, but also upon the heart.

How greatly they deceive themselves who imagine that a complete course of religious instruction suffices for the making of a good Christian! A knowledge of Christian doctrine does not succeed in gaining over the will; it cannot ensure to it that firmness which makes a fall improbable. Religious instruction is necessary. It is the requisite basis of the Christian edifice, but it is also necessary that a courageous practice of virtue shall have weakened the inclination to vice, and that grace, finding fewer obstacles in the way, should have been able to extend its dominion until it has touched the heart and penetrated it profoundly. *Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus.* When the heart has thus "tasted and recognized how sweet the Lord is," when, ravished by His delights, it has given itself completely to Him—not by the transitory gift of a day, which would pass away, and leave but few traces behind, but rather by a long and faithful service, faith

becomes deeper, and it is then more difficult for the soul's enemies to seduce it and turn it away from its duties.

Before they can be rightly understood the truths of religion must have been practised and loved. Faith, which is one of the effects of grace, comes as much from the heart as from the intellect ; the will has as great a share in it as the reason. Thus, those deeply devout souls whom we meet in the world do not owe that almost unmovable constancy, that attachment to God which we so admire in them, to a more profound but purely theoretical knowledge of religion, neither must we seek to explain it by their home training. They have all been subjected to a special schooling in grace, an inward transformation, more or less slow, more or less complete, but always sweet and powerful. They have all known how to pray, to give themselves to serious reflection ; they have all had to strive and to practise self-denial, if only in the fight against their own failings, and this has been their part in the work of transformation. But they have all also experienced the twofold action of God upon His faithful souls—namely, spiritual consolations and the trials which have refined their love.

165. This is why it would be a move in the wrong direction to profess to obtain everything by means of instruction. A Christian education, a training in virtue, must, even with children, go hand in hand with lessons in the catechism ; and in the case of young men and women we must aim at obtaining a real devotion from them if their perseverance is to be assured. If there should happen to be any priests who have misunderstood, or, at least, imperfectly comprehended, these great principles, we could convince them out of their own experience. Whence have they derived their love for the Church, their zeal for God's glory, their spirit of fidelity to duty ? To explain these feelings, which have become, as it were, a second nature to them, must they not go back to the days of their seminary life or novitiate, to that blessed time when

their nascent generosity was so greatly encouraged by the charm and sweetness which a life full of recollection and prayer had for them ? Did not the light shine more brilliantly in their minds as their hearts were more deeply moved ? Did not the truth reveal itself to them more and more fully because they loved it better daily, and was it not amongst these noble ardours of devotion and generosity that their faith struck down such vigorous roots ?

§ 2. Failings and Imperfections of Devout Souls.

166. But is there not another and a darker side to this picture of devout souls which we have just drawn ? Alas ! we must own that their feelings of generosity are not sufficiently deep. The sensible operations of grace, of which we have spoken, have come into more direct contact with the surface of the soul. In its depths there remain defects which, although perhaps not very apparent, are real and at times dangerous.

First with reference to beginners.

Souls who have only just entered upon this life of piety cannot possess all virtues in a very high degree at the outset. The natural failings are more or less fettered by the sensible action of grace, but they are not really weakened and reduced (as will be the case later on) by a sustained practice of virtue and by trials borne in a right spirit.

St. John of the Cross, in the first volume of his *Obscure Night*, has painted a very powerful, justly admired picture of these imperfections natural to beginners. We cannot do better than to summarize his teaching. The sketch will perhaps be found somewhat gloomy, but we must not forget that the Saint is speaking of those who are at the very threshold of the life of piety. Those who have sojourned longer in this third mansion may, without being emancipated from these imperfections, have nevertheless conquered them in part, and consequently have weakened

them. Neither must we take it for granted that every beginner possesses all the imperfections in question, nor that those from which they actually suffer have necessarily reached the degree which the Saint describes. He himself practically says as much. Amongst those who are given up to these blemishes, "some go on to very serious imperfections, and come to great harm thereby. Some, however, fall into them less than others, and some have to contend with little more than the first movements of them. But scarcely anyone can be found who, in his first fervours, did not fall into some of them" (chap. ii., § 6).

In his enumeration of these faults, the holy writer follows the order of the capital sins.

167. *Pride*.—"When beginners," says St. John of the Cross, "become aware of their own fervour and diligence in their spiritual works and devotional exercises, this prosperity of theirs gives rise to secret pride—though holy things tend of their own nature to humility—because of their imperfections, and the issue is that they conceive a certain satisfaction in the contemplation of their works and of themselves. . . . Their fervour and desire to do these and other works is frequently fed by Satan in order that they may grow in pride and presumption. He knows perfectly well that all their virtue and works are not only nothing worth, but rather tending to sin. Some of them go so far as to think none good but themselves, and so at all times, both in word and deed, fall into condemnation and detraction of others. They see the mote in the eye of their brother, but not the beam which is in their own. They strain out the gnat in another man's cup, and swallow the camel in their own."

The wish to advance, when it is inspired by the love of God, is certainly very praiseworthy; but in some self-centred souls this desire comes from quite another cause. They hate to see themselves surpassed; they do not wish to be inferior to anyone. If they hear any mention of a sublime act of virtue, they immediately aspire to accom-

plish it, thinking nothing beyond their strength. Instead of acting with simplicity and sincerity, climbing up by degrees, according to the measure of grace received, they wish to rise of themselves, without the help of God or man, and so we see them rejecting encouragement, disdaining counsels, and trusting only to their own lights.

Others complacently survey their own works. They count up their sacrifices, victories, difficulties overcome, and at the same time, like the Pharisee of the Gospel, they are passing very severe judgments upon those who are more meritorious in God's sight than themselves.

"Some beginners, too," says St. John of the Cross again, "make light of their faults, and at other times indulge in immoderate grief when they commit them. They thought themselves already saints, and so they become angry and impatient with themselves, which is another great imperfection. They also importune God to deliver them from their faults and imperfections, but it is for the comfort of living in peace, unmolested by them, and not for God."

St. Francis of Sales says the same thing in his charming way. "Although reason will that, when we commit faults, we should be sorry and vexed about them, yet should we guard against a bitter and resentful displeasure, being fretful and angry with ourselves. In which respect many make a great mistake, who, having been angry, are vexed at having been vexed, become annoyed at having been annoyed, and fret at having been fretful. These angers, fretfulnesses, and bitternesses that we feel against ourselves tend to pride, and originate in our self-love, which is troubled and anxious at finding itself imperfect." And the holy Bishop justly says that the existence of a natural vexation, rather than a true contrition, is clearly shown in that these hasty repents are not in accordance with the gravity of our faults, but according to our own inclinations. For example, he who loves chastity will reproach himself with unexampled bitterness at the least offence against that virtue, and will merely laugh at a grave slander

of which he has been guilty. On the other hand, he who hates slander will torment himself because of some slight whisperings, and will take no heed of a grievous sin against chastity; and so with others" (*Devout Life*, part iii., chap. ix.).

168. *Avarice*.—“Many a beginner,” says St. John of the Cross, “also falls at times into great spiritual avarice. Scarcely anyone is contented with that measure of the spirit which God gives. They are very disconsolate and querulous because they do not find the comfort they desire in spiritual things. Many are never satisfied with listening to spiritual counsels and precepts, with reading books which treat of their state, and they spend more time in this than in doing their duty, having no regard to that mortification and perfection of interior poverty of spirit to which they ought to apply themselves. Besides, they load themselves with images, rosaries, and crucifixes, curious and costly, now taking up one, then another, now changing them, and then resuming them again. At one time they will have them of a certain fashion, at another time of another, prizing one more than another because more curious or costly. Some may be seen with an *Agnus Dei*, and with relics and medals, like children with coral.

“I condemn here that attachment and clinging of the heart to the form, number, and variety of these things, because in direct opposition to poverty of spirit, which looks only to the substance of devotion, which makes use, indeed, of these things, but only sufficiently for the end, and despairs that variety and curiosity; for real devotion must spring out of the heart, and consider only the truth and substance which the objects in question represent” (*Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. iii.).

169. *Anger*.—“Many beginners, because of their inordinate appetite for spiritual sweetness, generally fall into many imperfections in the matter of anger, for when spiritual things minister to them no more sweetness and delight, they naturally become peevish, and in that bitter-

ness of spirit prove a burden to themselves in all they do. Trifles make them angry, and they are at times intolerable to all about them. This happens generally after great sweetness in prayer, and so, when that sensible sweetness is past, their natural temper is soured and rendered morose. They are like a babe weaned from the breast, which he found so sweet. When this natural feeling of displeasure is not permitted to grow, there is no sin, but only imperfection, which will have to be purged away in the severity and aridities of the dark night. There are other spiritual persons, too, among these who fall into another kind of spiritual anger. They are angry with other people for their faults with a sort of unquiet zeal, and watch them ; they are occasionally moved to blame them, and even do so in anger, constituting themselves guardians of virtue. All this is contrary to spiritual meekness " (*Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. v.).

But it is not only with regard to failings which they perceive in others that these Christians show themselves impatient and irritable. It is the same when they have to bear some annoyance or contradiction. In the words of St. Francis of Sales, " it is a very harmful imperfection, from which few people are free. If it should happen that we have to blame our neighbour or complain about him (which should rarely happen to us), we never make an end of it, but go on over and over again, endlessly reiterating our complaints and grievances. And this is a mark of a resentful heart which is lacking in true charity " (*Letter to Madame de Brulard*, January, 1606).

170. *Spiritual Gluttony*.—“ There is much to say of the fourth capital sin, which is spiritual gluttony, for there is scarcely one among beginners, however good his progress, who in the matter of this sin does not fall into some of the many imperfections to which beginners are liable, because of that sweetness which in the beginning they find in spiritual exercises. Many beginners, delighting in the sweetness and joy of their spiritual occupations, strive

after spiritual sweetness rather than after pure and true devotion, which is that which God regards and accepts in the whole course of the spiritual way. For this reason, over and above their imperfection in seeking after sweetness in devotion, the spirit of gluttony, which has taken possession of them, forces them to overstep the limits of moderation, within which virtue is acquired and consists. For, allured by the delights they then experience, some of them kill themselves by penances, and others weaken themselves by fasting. They take upon themselves more than they can bear, without rule or advice ; they try to conceal their austerities from those whom they are bound to obey, and some even venture to practise them though commanded to abstain. . . . Many of these importune their spiritual directors to allow them to do their own will. They extort that permission as if by force, and if it be refused, they mope like children, and become discontented, and think they are not serving God whenever they are thwarted. These persons, clinging to sweetness and their own will, the moment they are contradicted and directed according to the will of God, become fretful, faint-hearted, and then fall away. They imagine that to please and satisfy themselves is to serve and please God. . . . These persons, when they communicate, strive with all their might for sensible sweetness, instead of worshipping in humility and praising God within themselves. . . . They conduct themselves in the same way when they are praying, for they imagine that the whole business of prayer consists in sensible devotion, and this they strive to obtain with all their might, wearying out their brains and perplexing all the faculties of their souls. When they miss that sensible devotion they are cast down, thinking they have done nothing. This effort after sweetness destroys true devotion and spirituality, which consists in perseverance in prayer, with patience and humility, mistrusting self, solely to please God. Therefore, when they once miss sweetness in prayer, or in any other act of religion, they feel a sort

of repugnance to resume it, and sometimes cease from it altogether" (*Obscure Night*, chap. vi.).

171. *Envy and Spiritual Sloth*.—“Beginners are not free from many imperfections in the matter of the two vices, envy and spiritual sloth. Many of them are often vexed because of other men’s goodness. They are sensibly afflicted when others outstrip them on the spiritual road, and will not endure to hear them praised. They become fretful over other men’s virtues, and are sometimes unable to refrain from contradiction when they are commended ; they depreciate them as much as they can, and feel acutely because they themselves are not thought so well of, for they wish to be preferred above all others. . . . As to spiritual sloth, beginners are wont to find their most spiritual occupations irksome, and avoid them as repugnant to their taste, for, being so given to sweetness in spiritual things, they loathe them when they find none. . . . Many of these will have it that God should will that which they will, and are afflicted when they must will that which He wills, reluctantly submitting their own to the Divine will. . . . They also find it wearisome to obey when they are commanded to do that which they like not, and because they walk in the way of consolation and spiritual sweetness they are too weak for the rough trials of perfection” (*Obscure Night*, chap. vii.).

Many devout souls, as we have said above, do not display these serious failings which the holy writer has just depicted. They serve God with good-will, walk onwards in sweetness and tranquillity, and are a source of edification and good example. We recognize, however, that they are as yet only at the threshold of devotion, because the fundamental virtues—humility, patience, and mortification—are not deeply rooted within them. A little trial, a humiliation, finds them all too much in subjection to the senses, and so they let themselves slide into many faults of inadvertence or of frailty.

CHAPTER III

ARID PIETY

§ 1. The Diminution of Sensible Favours.

172. FROM this teaching of St. John of the Cross it follows that Christian souls arrived at this point in the spiritual life are full of laudable dispositions, but are still far from perfection. Some Christians spend their whole life in this state. They are too changeable, too weak in the fight against self, to merit being raised higher. But whilst still maintaining themselves at this point, they experience a great alteration in their interior condition. *Sensible consolations are gradually withdrawn* from them ; they no longer receive in such great abundance those helps which proved so powerful a support to their weakness. They bear up, thanks to the stability of their faith, and also to the good habits that they have formed—habits which are certainly insufficient for their advancement, but which suffice to prevent their relapse.

And here, in passing, let us make the consoling reflection that these habits, whilst lessening their difficulties, do not diminish their merits. They are, in fact, accepted, acquiesced in, loved. All the actions which proceed from them have been, and are still, desired ; they are thus free and meritorious.

As we are speaking of aridity, it is necessary to define it. Some authors seem to confound dryness with a tendency to distractions or with powerlessness. These conditions of soul, *are, however, distinct, although frequently present together.* The soul, harassed by distractions, does not reflect on the truths of faith as much as it would wish, but sometimes it is able to enter into them and be moved by them. The soul in a state of impotence grieves at its inability to meditate or dwell upon consoling thoughts ;

its reason seems paralysed ; it can vaguely call to mind certain truths, but cannot go to the bottom of them, incapable as it is of sustained thought. On the other hand, it may happen that a soul may be in a state of dryness, and yet make these serious considerations. It represents to itself the mysteries of faith without any difficulty, but all these reflections, remembrances, and representations, which strengthen it, fail to move it. They may determine the will to act, but without causing any emotion in the sensible part of the soul. *Dryness, then, is only the diminution or withdrawal of sensible sweetness.*

173. Whence comes this diminution of sensible graces ? Speaking above (No. 162) on the momentary withdrawal of spiritual consolations, we said that a frequent cause was the infidelity of Christian souls. Their cowardice, their neglect in responding to the calls of grace, bring it about that God no longer shows Himself so lavish of His favours. Their sins, their culpable attachments to the things of this world, which cause them a thousand turmoils and pre-occupations, which lead to all kinds of desires, and engross all the thoughts of their hearts, prevent them from taking pleasure in the things of God.

Many pious persons fall into these aridities, and are unable to recognize the real cause. They will not own that they correspond badly with the inspirations of grace, which urge them to a life of recollection and self-denial. They grieve the Holy Spirit by their faithlessness, and they are astonished because His presence becomes less sensible and His consolations fewer. Want of charity towards their neighbours is also a frequent cause of dryness. If they endeavoured to see all the supernatural qualities in their brethren, their faith, their avoidance of evil, their attachment to good, everything in them which pleases the heart of God, everything which, being the principle of their merit, will live for ever, will be the cause of their sublime glory throughout eternity, God would be well pleased—He would shed upon them some small por-

tion of His Divine joy. But they stop, on the contrary, to dwell upon those human defects which will one day pass away, leaving no traces behind. They regard their neighbour, not with the eyes of faith, but from an entirely human point of view, so that the least thing that goes wrong upsets and embitters them, makes them impatient, and so stifles the sweet sentiments of devotion which grace was striving to establish in their hearts.

Besides, *assueta vilescent*, the sensible faculties, which in that respect are greatly inferior to the spiritual, soon arrive at a condition in which they are no longer moved by objects which formerly impressed them deeply. It is a recognized fact that sensibility becomes blunted. It is natural, therefore, that the influence of sensible graces should not always be maintained at its same degree of intensity.

Further, and independently of these causes, Providence may act directly to the same end ; indeed, it would not be good for the Christian soul to remain for an indefinite period in that condition of emotional sensibility in which it could never attain to true perfection.

174. God, then, in order to purify it, removes these sensible consolations at intervals and for a time. The sweet emotions which it formerly experienced at the thought of religious truths, or in the practice of works of piety, then cease to be felt. The most striking considerations leave the heart cold and seemingly unmoved. The understanding, moreover, dwells with difficulty upon these considerations, the imagination can scarcely call up mysteries which formerly impressed it vividly, or, at least, it cannot take a firm hold upon them. Aridity and an inexpressible and universal distaste have succeeded to the former consolations. To these may be added sorrows of heart, anxieties acutely felt, and fierce and prolonged temptations.

We will ignore those cowardly souls in whom dryness has only been the result of faithlessness, and who, in order

to win more powerful graces, must correct their failure and exhibit more generosity. We pass over in silence also, for the present, those strong souls who emerge from this ordeal more loving and more holy than before, and we will speak of those who, without being as blameworthy as the first, are not so courageous as the second. Their dryness seems to be willed by God for their advancement, but their lack of courage and constancy prevents the purifying action from producing its effect.

§ 2. Faults of those who fail to Profit by this Trial of Dryness.

175. This is the moment, according to Father Libermann (*Writings*, p. 227), “when the great—yea, the very great—number leave the true path of prayer, owing to anxieties, discouragement, false convictions, stubbornness, obstinacy, and the other defects into which they allow themselves to fall by impatience, self-love, and the desire to overcome these difficulties. It is absolutely necessary for them to give up their own ideas, and submit to the trial with a great interior humility in the presence of God. At this moment they greatly need a good director, and still more perfect obedience. . . .”

Souls “which have only spent a short time in the state of sensible delights, or have not been favoured with them abundantly, usually bear this painful purgation of the senses badly,¹ and, generally speaking, they fall into the faults

¹ Is this the phenomenon which St. John of the Cross calls the night of the senses, and of which we shall have to speak more fully? It is true that in these souls which we are here considering, there is not that seeking after God, that thirst for Him, which is the characteristic element of the night of the senses, and a sign that this withdrawal of sensible graces is a trial brought about by Providence, and not the result of relaxation. However, in both cases the principle may be the same, but with the imperfect either the remembrance of God was quickly effaced as soon as they yielded to bitterness and discouragement, or their want of submission and

referred to above, and end in one of these three conditions : (1) They pass into a state of scruples, uncertainty and a troubled conscience, from which they may escape with great difficulty, or not at all ; or, again, they do so only to sink completely into relaxation and dissipation. (2) Or they go astray, give up or become negligent in prayer, and begin to seek their pleasure and their gratification in creatures or in the satisfactions of self-love. (3) Or their relations with God become more and more difficult : their prayers are few and feeble, they remain divided between God and the creature, and never attain to real sanctity.

“ Many of them serve God, however, and really work for His glory. They perfect themselves in their own state, and acquire much merit ; but they always retain many failings and attachments to themselves, their own senses, and to creatures. These souls form all kinds of imperfect habits, and needs of created things. They are never completely generous ; they do not fly, but walk in the ways of God ; they do not perform their actions perfectly and purely. Nevertheless, they do many things for the love of God, although other loves are often mingled with it. It does not, however, cease to be good and true.

“ These souls are very full of activity, and sometimes devote themselves for a considerable period to purely natural occupations, which have no other use or purpose than that of their own pleasure. Necessary actions, such as eating, drinking, recreation, they perform—very frequently, at least—through human motives and principles. They take delight in and enjoy the pleasures which these actions cause, even when they direct their intention in a supernatural manner. Sometimes they are extremely good and pleasing to God, and very busy in procuring His glory, despite these imperfections in their supernatural actions : in the celebration of Holy Mass, in confession, preaching, etc.,

generosity has prevented God from finishing His work, and making them experience the powerful attraction which He exercises over more detached and more loving hearts.

in the case of priests, for example, where a crowd of imperfections and defects are always mingled. There are some, however, who are very careful in their preparation for these holy occupations and in trying to perform them as well as possible ; but all these imperfections and defects recur none the less. At other times, after very full and careful preparation, they fall into grave faults in the exercise of these sacred functions—sometimes before, sometimes afterwards.

176. "All these defects come because the higher powers can only attain to God by the senses, because they are, so to speak, dependent upon the sensible faculties, and these latter can never attain to great perfection by themselves. Their sole perfection consists in remaining quiet, docile, submissive, and dependent upon the higher powers, and in never taking action except at their bidding. Perfection in an inferior consists in obeying, and not in commanding. The conduct of a soul thus given over to the lower faculties is blindness. It can never arrive at perfect prudence. Sometimes it is right, sometimes wrong. It therefore follows that the soul is ignorant of what God asks of it. It does not yet know its own disposition, and allows itself to be entangled in a host of snares and delusions. It is also passionate in its conduct. *It constantly forms its opinion and acts from impulse and prejudice.*"

The Venerable author explains this imperfect state by the predominance of the sensible faculties, which are always greedy for delights and anxious for satisfactions. The higher faculties—the intellect and will—not having been able to emancipate themselves sufficiently to enable them to act for themselves, as with the contemplative souls, remain weak and powerless, and it is practically impossible for the soul to practise real Christian self-denial.

177. "The higher faculties," says Father Libermann, "have access to God only by way of the senses."¹

¹ These words should not be taken too literally ; the writer's view is not so uncompromising : as is, moreover, easy to understand from the context.

So, before they can unite themselves with God in fervent prayer, or, again, before the will can form strong resolutions, the senses must be favourably disposed—as happens, for example, at certain functions and specially impressive religious ceremonies—or else the imagination must be greatly affected and the heart touched. Then all is well ; but if the soul is in a state of dryness its generosity fails it. So, again, we may be capable of certain sacrifices, sometimes very painful ones, provided that they appeal to the imagination, and appear in a favourable light ; but if the sensible faculties are not touched, if the unassisted reason coldly considers the goodness of the act to be accomplished, then good-bye to energy and zeal ; we fall back inert and powerless.

For the same reason these souls “enjoy an easy devotion when everything is as they wish, but it disappears when anything goes wrong. This is just the opposite of what happens to strong souls and those wholly given over to God. Such souls never feel more happiness, more devotion, than when they are overwhelmed with troubles, and they seem unsatisfied when all goes well with them ” (Ven. Fr. Libermann, *Writings*, p. 591).

And it is the same with temptations. When sensible graces are abundant they overcome them easily, but if these are wanting they are very liable to be conquered themselves. These souls are really in sincere dispositions not to sin, and would even desire to avoid slight faults ; but as they are distracted by a crowd of purely natural preoccupations they are very often taken by surprise, and before they are really aware they give way to hasty motions of self-love, impatience, vanity, etc. The majority of their faults are of this kind.

If they have time to reflect they do not so easily succumb. Nevertheless, if their own interest is at stake, or if their passions are aroused, they cannot make up their minds to sacrifice this interest or to overcome that passion. Caught on the horns of this dilemma (the choice between

sinning and doing violence to their inclinations), and wishing to avoid both alternatives, they try to delude themselves with poor excuses. At heart they do not succeed in deceiving themselves entirely, and they are quite conscious of their sin. But these faults, committed reluctantly and not deliberately, partake rather of frailty than malice. Cowardice, however, always enters into them.

178. In the same way, and more easily still, they yield to desires which, as they know, are not inspired by supernatural motives. But here, also, they try to shield themselves under specious pretexts. "When we want a thing," says Father Lallemant, "we find a thousand reasons which give colour to our desire. We deceive ourselves when, having formed some plan for purely natural motives, we go on to search for some supernatural reason on the side of grace to support this design. 'I will go and call on Mr. So-and-so, because then I shall be able to advise him to make a retreat.' Usually this *because then* springs from a wrong motive. It is an invention of self-love which is very clever at finding out such reasons."

If Father Lallemant had lived in our time, perhaps he would have given another turn to this remark. He would have pointed to those cautious people who slip away before a disagreeable duty, and are so clever at finding specious excuses for their inaction. "Let us remain quiescent, and avoid this bother. Let us not get ourselves entangled in this matter, particularly as real inconveniences might result from our intervention." Alas ! what they really dread are by no means these inconveniences, for there are often greater ones involved in escaping from duty, but their dearly loved repose would be sacrificed. Perhaps, however, on reflection, these wiseacres decide to act, cost what it may, "for what would good people otherwise think ?" The desire for esteem and approval gets the better of their love of repose ; vanity is stronger than cowardice. This is what we meet with in Christians of

conviction, who think themselves, and indeed actually are, pious.

179. We said that they did not really deceive themselves. There are many, however, who in the long run end by deluding themselves and falling into true defects, without being fully conscious of so doing. Where certain imperfections and slight failings are concerned they are then like those sinners whose hearts are hardened in respect of mortal sins: they scarcely even regard them as serious, and no longer feel any remorse for them.

Some finish by taking for firmness what is really only a very natural desire to have their own way, and by regarding as a good quality that inflexibility with which they support their caprices. Others give the name of dignity to what is simply self-love, or, again, a mere liking for comfort becomes a fine spirit of order, while a natural love of action or the satisfaction of their vanity is decorated with the name of zeal.

Others call by the name of decision a disposition which is really only precipitation, and their prudence is that which St. Paul would term the wisdom of the flesh, *sapientia carnis*. Those who delight in severe and unjust judgments take this outcome of their self-esteem and self-love for the love of truth and zeal for good, but the bitterness which fills their conversation ought to show them that they are not inspired by the spirit of God. We may see persons of a truly sincere piety performing the duties of their state negligently because they are always engrossed with themselves, and they pass a considerable part of their lives in the care of their own persons, having ended by persuading themselves that their excessively delicate health necessitates the most elaborate precautions. Others, again, are so over-attached to this world's goods that they push their anxiety about their business to excess, and then artlessly present themselves as models of good order and economy.

How astounded will these poor deluded souls be on the day of their appearance before the supreme Judge, when,

every veil being removed, the picture of their wrong-doings will be exposed to a light by which the smallest details will be revealed !

But all devout souls are not so blind to their faults. There are many who are more honest with themselves, who recognize, deplore, and would like to get rid of their weaknesses, but they only fight against them half-heartedly and inconstantly. "So they pass whole years, and often whole lives, in bargaining as to whether they will give themselves entirely to God. They cannot make up their minds to sacrifice everything ; they withhold many affections, designs, wishes, hopes, and aspirations, being unwilling to despoil themselves in order to attain to that perfect nudity of spirit which is necessary for those who desire to be fully possessed by God " (Lallemand, 2 principe, section i., chap. i., article 2).

180. It would take too long to describe this mixture of good and evil, of good qualities and defects, which are to be found in the Christians of whom we are speaking. They have real virtues, a sincere and habitual desire to serve God ; they commit few, and even, for the most part, no serious, faults ; they never let a day pass without often thinking of God. If they are privileged to be priests, they will have zeal, regularity, and a laudable attachment to their sacred functions. All these good qualities are due to their ardent faith, a faith which has developed, as we have said, under the influence of the sensible graces which God has granted to them, and which is kept alive by their life of piety, by the practice of certain virtues, and by fidelity in prayer.

But the list of their faults is long enough : inconstancy, self-love, a great love of comfort, and an often obstinate attachment to their own ideas and fancies. The same man who will spend himself freely because the exercise of zeal is agreeable to him, will not brook contradiction. He will try to set others down, especially those who put him in the shade on his own ground. He will throw doubts on

their knowledge, their prudence, and their tact ; he will impugn their intentions, all, doubtless, almost unconsciously, but this does not exonerate him from blame.

181. In all Christians of the third degree self-abnegation is not non-existent, but incomplete. *They do not seem quite to understand the value of perfect renunciation ; they do not aspire to it.* From this it follows that their virtues and imperfections not only succeed one another, but frequently combine in the accomplishment of one and the same work. Thus, in the exercise of zeal, they mingle much purely natural activity with their faith ; they lean heavily upon human means, and have not that perfect trust in God which gives such tranquil energy and complete self-control to perfect souls.

In the edifice which each of us is building for eternity there are, says the Apostle, materials of very different value. All will pass through the fire ; gold, silver, and precious stones will be refined in it, while the wood, hay, and stubble will be consumed. Those of whom we speak doubtless employ valuable materials in their daily work, but they also allow many worthless elements to enter in, and these will become so much fuel for the purifying fire.

Whilst awaiting "the day of the Lord, in which the work of every one shall appear as it is" (*uniuscujusque opus manifestum erit, dies enim Domini declarabit*), it is not easy for the human eye to estimate the value of the edifice. Sometimes a layer of precious metals conceals less valuable materials ; sometimes, on the other hand, the gold and silver are hidden under a common exterior. In some the good qualities, in others the failings, are visible at first sight. All hasty judgments run a great risk of being erroneous.

182. However, we may declare, without fear of mistake, that the more or less visible failings which we have attributed to Christians of this class are very prejudicial to their merits, and if they are obliged by their state of life to work for the salvation and sanctification of others—

many priests and religious must be classed in this third mansion—such numerous imperfections are very injurious to their work. Too much occupied with themselves, these evangelical workers “do nothing simply for God; they seek their own will in all things, and always secretly mingle their own interest with the glory of God in their best undertakings.”

See how vexed and tempted to discouragement they become when their works have not all the success that they desire! If they were so anxious about succeeding, it was, indeed, for the glory of God, but also, as their vexation proves, for their own personal satisfaction.

So long as they are not further advanced in renunciation, their works and their activity will perhaps appear to be very efficacious, they themselves not being the last to think so; but in reality their zeal, without being actually barren, will not produce much fruit.

183. St. Teresa describes, as we have done, the condition of souls in the third mansion, and points out the mixture of piety and imperfection to be found in them.

“I have known some, in fact—I may say, a number of souls—who have arrived at this state, and for many years lived apparently a regular and well-ordered life, both of body and mind. It would seem that they must have gained the mastery over this world, or, at least, be extremely detached from it; yet they become so disturbed and disheartened when His Majesty sends very moderate trials as not only to astonish, but to make me anxious about them. . . . Something of the same sort happens if such people meet with contempt or want of due respect. God often gives them grace to bear it well, for, as He loves to see virtue upheld in public, He will not have it condemned in those who practise it, or else because these persons have served Him faithfully, and He Who is our supreme Good is exceedingly good to us all. Nevertheless, these persons are disturbed, and cannot overcome or get rid of the feeling for some time. Alas! have they not

long meditated on the pains our Lord endured, on how good it is to suffer, and have even longed to do so? They wish every one were as good as they are, and God grant they do not think other people are to blame for their troubles, and attribute merit to themselves!"¹

The Saint gives other examples of imperfections which are met with in this third mansion—an attachment more or less avowed to the goods of this world, eagerness to increase them, and that excessive fear of doing too much, of exceeding the bounds of prudence, of endangering rest or health in the service of the Master, etc. Such are the weaknesses which St. Teresa rightly censures. They are found, indeed, in those sincerely good souls who, moreover, are quite conscious of their own merit, but who are still far from perfection.

§ 3. Faults proceeding from the Temperament.

184. In all the souls of which we have hitherto spoken the faults of temperament are very apparent. They are especially noticeable in the first degrees of virtue; they become less grievous, but do not disappear, during the period of sensible consolation; then, if the soul ceases to rise in virtue, they again become more marked. Temperament is really a natural disposition proceeding from our organism. So long as the spiritual powers of the soul are not strong enough to resist the impulses of the lower faculties, the temperament makes itself actively felt.

Before the Fall all the elements of the human body were in a state of perfect equilibrium, no one had a harmful preponderance over another; since that sin this beautiful harmony has disappeared. Doubtless in many persons the different principles of activity—moderation, impressibility, and firmness—are happily balanced, but in many others one of [the elements has a [very powerful and the rest a very weak action. The organism is then

¹ *Third Mansion, chap. ii.*

badly harmonized, and exerts an unsatisfactory influence over the soul.

The sanguine, lymphatic, nervous, and biliary temperaments are those usually recognized. Whether or no it is right to attribute the characters which we are going to describe to the predominance of the elements signified by these words we shall not discuss. This question it is not in our power to decide, but the existence of the characters themselves cannot be denied, and the reader will allow us to connect them with the influence of these different elements, if only because this hypothesis is generally admitted.

185. There are persons whose natural dispositions are ardent, but thoughtless. They are active, but inconstant, amiable and engaging when nothing puts them out, but hasty and impatient in face of obstacles. However, their ill-humour is short-lived, and does not degenerate into rancour. They are optimistic; but they are imprudent, because everything appears roseate to them, and they do not take sufficient time for reflection. When any business is submitted to them they think to settle it in three words. They are neither effeminate nor lazy, do not lack initiative, set to work with all their might, but they easily become suspicious and jealous when others succeed better than themselves. They are of a pleasant disposition, are often gay and impulsive, prompt at repartee, but changeable, meddlesome, and rash. When the blood is active and hot, and other elements do not come to moderate its action, it is thought to be the source of these qualities and defects, and so this temperament is called the sanguine temperament.

186. Very different are the defects associated with the lymphatic temperament—slowness, listlessness, and effeminacy. “I cannot; it is too hard: it is impossible!” Such is the complaint which frequently escapes the lips of a lymphatic person. His blood seems frozen in his veins, and nothing can warm it. His indolence preserves him

from great crimes, but so long as it does not give place to a supernatural energy, he is incapable of true virtue. When the element which produces this apathy exists only in a small degree, it acts as a moderator to the hastiness of the sanguine temperament. It allows the soul time for reflection and the formation of its plans ; but if it predominates it breeds idleness and inactivity.

187. Still more deplorable are the defects of the nervous temperament. We have depicted the fickleness of the sanguine ; the inconstancy of the nervous is still more troublesome. The most insignificant causes produce strong impressions upon them, and these frequently have no real basis, but are purely imaginary. If the imagination does not entirely create the phantoms which disturb the nervous, plunge them into deep gloom, or give rise to chimerical hopes, at least it exaggerates the smallest facts, and leads them to draw the most unexpected conclusions.

The imagination dominates all these nervous people. This faculty is at once changeable and tenacious. Sometimes, indeed, it passes in a moment and without any reason from one conviction to another which is quite opposite ; sometimes, also, it attaches itself without any cause to a groundless fancy. It feeds upon it, returns to it ceaselessly, and derives from it feelings of joy or sadness, love or hatred, which have no foundation in fact. Reason has very little hold upon the nervous, so if they give way to their tendencies, *if they neglect the sole means of correcting themselves, which is to fight against their nerves and their impressions with a firm and energetic will*, they become more and more fantastical, capricious, and eccentric.

However, the entire absence of nervosity would not be a good quality. He who, whilst knowing always how to control and guide himself by wise and carefully considered motives, has strong feelings as to both good and evil, will be able to communicate to others his good and salutary impressions. We must be moved ourselves in order to move others.

188. A cold, energetic, resolute, and tenacious¹ character is usually attributed to persons of a bilious temperament. The good qualities to which this temperament predisposes are most valuable. On the other hand, when it is undiluted it readily engenders hardness, egotism, love of authority, and a desire to rule. It also leads easily to harsh and unjust judgments, criticisms, and disparagements. People of a bilious temperament are often pessimistic. In their dealings with their neighbours they show themselves neither frank nor amiable.

189. The qualities and defects proceeding from the temperament are seldom so pronounced as in the cases painted above, because the different elements referred to combine and modify each other, and also because education and the lessons of experience contribute to the correction of these natural failings. Also, the mental gifts—the intelligence and a sound judgment—often mitigate the seriousness of these faults. But conflicts bravely sustained for the love of God, and frequent victories won, will do most to weaken their violence.

Cowardly and self-opinionated Christians struggle but half-heartedly against their temperaments. They fancy that they have found an excuse for their indolence when they have said : “It is not my fault that I have such and such a failing. If I am constitutionally violent, apathetic, or foolishly impressionable, I am not responsible. I did not choose my own temperament.” The generous soul does not resort to these profitless excuses. It fights, and if it does not always succeed in making them disappear entirely, it at least eradicates to some extent the faults of its natural disposition. When by its fidelity it has climbed the steps of perfection, and obtained the important graces

¹ Energy and tenacity may proceed from the will (as we shall show later on), and, consequently, from the character of the soul and not that of the organism. Nevertheless, we think that it is true, as generally believed, that certain temperaments can take a share on their own account in producing these dispositions.

of light and strength which God grants to fervent and perfect souls, it will see its native good qualities increase and become supernaturalized, and its defects grow much less and become almost imperceptible.

CHAPTER IV

HOW A SOUL MAY FALL FROM THIS STATE OF PIETY

190. THOSE who have not been long in this degree of the spiritual life can easily fall back into less perfect dispositions, while those who have sojourned there for a fairly long period have acquired a certain stability, and, if they decline at all, do so imperceptibly. But even for these souls falls, although rare, are not unexampled. A dangerous occasion which they were not willing to forego, a disordered affection for a creature, numerous faults more and more consented to, a failing such as pride, sensuality, or avarice not combated, a wilful and persistent dissipation, prolonged neglect of devotional exercises—these are the causes which bring about the deterioration of souls, and ultimately lead to the most lamentable errors.

Qui spernit modica paulatim decidet—He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little (Eccl. xix. 1). Such a soul, formerly devout, frequently gives way to sin in some slight matter ; it makes light of its faults. In other words, it does not conceive sorrow for them. *It does not seek to make reparation for them.* It excuses itself, and strives to lessen them in its own eyes by poor excuses. So long as it recognized its faults humbly, and repented of them, its conscience remained sensitive, and the will, despite its weakness, continued to be sincerely attached to good. But later, having desired to reject the light, it has succeeded only too well in clothing itself with darkness. Then the understanding is less enlightened, and at the same time the will turns away from good, and attaches

itself to what is to be condemned. Enlightened as to certain duties which it continues to fulfil faithfully, it no longer understands the exigencies and delicacies of the virtues that it neglects. But if the evil extends, if the right actions become rare, and wilful falls multiply, then the good dispositions grow weak and the bad develop. Such is the story of all those who descend from the degrees of perfection to which they were raised. Their collapse is not due to frailty, but to a culpable blindness of the spirit and the will's attachment to sin.

Moreover, as we have already said (No. 53), it is harder for a fallen soul to regain its lost good dispositions than for those who have not abused the graces that they have received. In order to arrive afresh at the degree of perfection from which it has fallen, the soul must strive even more painfully than at the time of its first ascent, and the more painfully again according to the extent of its fall. Let it not think that it will recover what it has cast aside except by penance ; let it also understand that generous sacrifices are necessary in order to break its will and render it supple under the action of grace.

PART II.—THE DIRECTION OF DEVOUT SOULS

CHAPTER I

RECOLLECTION

191. As soon as a soul seems to be taking its first steps in the way of true piety, as soon as it is plain that it is under the influence of sensible favours, the first advice which should be given to it is to keep itself recollected. We have said that the inward operations of grace will be much more powerful if it holds aloof from the clamour of the world, and from everything which can distract. The voice of the Lord is not heard amidst the tumult—*non in commotione Dominus.* It is in the solitude that He speaks to the heart of man—*ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor ejus.* And this is why silence and repose are indispensable to advancement in piety—in *silentio et quiete proficit anima devota (Imitatio, i. 20).*

Ascetic authors are all very emphatic upon this point. One of the first counsels which St. Vincent Ferrer gives in his *Treatise on the Spiritual Life* to those who wish to devote themselves seriously to the service of God is this : “ You must set manfully to the work of curbing your tongue, so that this member, which ought to speak of useful things, may abstain from all useless and frivolous utterances.”

According to a comparison of Father Rodriguez (*Christian Perfection*, part ii., treatise ii., chap. v.), it is before all things essential to put a lock on a coffer if we wish to safeguard the treasures that it contains. The same author, quoting these words of Holy Scripture, “ The vessel that hath no cover nor binding over it shall be unclean ” (Num. xix. 15), says again : “ Just as this vessel, being uncovered, is exposed to all kinds of uncleanness, and to be filled with

dust and filth, so when the mouth is always open to speak the soul is soon filled with imperfections and sins."

The text of St. James, so often quoted, is very striking : " If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue, but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain " (Jas. i. 26). And, indeed, how can anyone practise acts of the love of God when he is so entirely taken up with frivolous cares that he does not even turn his thoughts towards Divine things ? So nothing exposes us to sin as much as dissipation—*in multiloquo non deerit peccatum*. While, on the other hand, " He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his soul " (Prov. xiii. 3).

192. It is a remarkable fact that in the lives of the Saints their first years of fervour were passed in solitude. St. Paul, newly converted, passes three years in the deserts of Arabia before giving himself up to the work of his Apostolate. St. Augustine at Tagaste, St. Benedict at Subiaco, St. Ignatius at Manresa, prepared by a life of retirement, silence, and prayer for the great works which they were to accomplish later. The majority of apostolic men—St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Francis Xavier, and many others—first fitted themselves for the perfect life in the solitude of the novitiate and the recollection of the cloister before accomplishing their sublime mission.

In well observed silence lies the great strength of religious communities and monastic houses ; but Christian souls living in the world may, and if they aspire after true piety must, in a certain measure also resort to this powerful means to perfection.

193. Recollection consists in two things : in closing the heart as far as possible to the cares and clamour of the earth, and in opening it on the side of heaven ; in avoiding distraction, and living in the exercise of the presence of God. To this end a real good-will is needed and is sufficient. May not every one be advised to love being alone with God, avoiding useless visits, frivolous reading, and long and trifling conversations ? Without living like a

hermit, it is usually possible to secure hours for rest and quiet. Whatever the position we occupy, if there are days when we really do not belong to ourselves, there are others when we enjoy a considerable liberty. Even those who are most overwhelmed with work can, if they know how to make the most of their time, find precious moments of calm and quiet.¹ A certain amount of decision is doubtless necessary in order to resist the importunate solicitations and possible criticisms of frivolous people who understand neither the value of time nor the advantage of a life retired from the world ; but these are obstacles which a true disciple of the Gospel ought to be able to overcome. He who wishes to be the servant of Jesus Christ must not make himself the slave of the world.

If, as Our Lord teaches us, we must avoid those words of which we shall have to give an account on the Day of Judgment, all the more ought we to shun occasions of dissipation and worldly entertainments. He who aspires to piety must abstain from them—at least, when good manners or lawful requirements do not make them a necessity.

With regard to engrossing occupations, they may really be a necessity of our condition, and then God, Who imposes them, gives to souls of a good-will the grace of remaining recollected in the midst of the turmoil. But if we have multiplied our own occupations, if, urged on by a too natural activity, we have imposed on ourselves works and distractions which could be curtailed without inconvenience, then it is a matter of remembering the words of St. Bernard to Pope Eugenius III.—*Maledicta occupatio quæ te retrahit a Deo* (Cursed be the work that keeps thee from God)—and of suppressing whatever is not absolutely necessary.

Freed, then, as far as circumstances will allow, from the

¹ "If you can tear yourself away from unnecessary talk and useless visits," says the *Imitation*, "if you shut your ears to the vain clamour of the world, you will find sufficient time to make holy meditations" (Book I., chap. xx., *Of the Love of Solitude and Silence*).

vain clamour and bewildering tumult of the world, we may reserve for ourselves hours of recollection which shall be dedicated to a self-imposed silence, both exterior and interior—exterior in not speaking at all except when obliged to do so, interior by banishing from our hearts cares, useless thoughts, and daydreams—in a word, all those creations of the imagination which are often more importunate than the most distracting conversations. It is quite evident, however, that we cannot perpetually bind ourselves down to this silence, and that when social duties require us to break it we must appear amiable and cheerful ; but all the same, we must sometimes know how to leave the world in order to find God.

194. And how should we occupy our flighty and wandering minds during these moments of peace and rest ? We should occupy them with serious and devout thoughts, and in sweet and pious meditations. Listen to St. Francis of Sales upon this subject : “It is here, dear Philothea, that I most affectionately require you to follow my advice, for *in this lies one of the surest means towards your spiritual advancement.*

“As frequently as you can, during the course of the day, recall yourself into the presence of God in one of the four ways I have shown you.¹ Consider what God is doing, and what you yourself are doing. You will see His eyes turned towards you, and fixed perpetually upon you with an incomparable love. Then say : ‘O God, why do I not always behold Thee, even as Thou always beholdest me ? Why do I think so seldom of Thee, when Thou, my Lord, dost think so often of me ? Where are we, O my soul ? Our true rest is in God, and where do we find ourselves ?’

“Just as the birds have nests in the trees to which they can retire, and the stags have their thickets and strongholds wherein to conceal themselves and lie hidden, enjoying the freshness of the shade in summer, so our hearts, Philothea, must daily seek out and choose some place, either on the

¹ See above, On Prayer (No. 130).

hill of Calvary or in the Wounds of our dear Lord, or some other spot, there to lay down our burdens and find an inner refreshment amidst the cares of the world, fleeing thereto as to a strong tower, that we may be defended against temptations.

"Remember, then, Philothea, to retreat frequently into the solitude of your own heart, even whilst bodily you are occupied in conversations and business ; and this mental solitude cannot in any way be hindered by the multitude of those around you, for they are not around your heart, but around your body, if only your heart remains alone in the single presence of God. That is how King David exercised himself among his many occupations, as his Psalms abundantly prove—for instance, when he said : ' My God, Thou art ever before me. The Lord is ever on my right hand. To Thee, O Lord, have I lifted up mine eyes. O Thou that dwellest in the heavens, mine eyes are ever looking to the Lord.'

"And our conversations are not usually of such importance that we cannot from time to time recall our hearts in order to retire into this Divine solitude " (*Devout Life*, ii. 12).

195. In the following chapter the Saint completes his advice, and shows how the exercise of the presence of God must be rather a matter of affection than of reason, and that the heart must have a greater share in it than the intellect.

"Aspire after God frequently, Philothea, by means of short but ardent acts of your heart. Admire His beauty, invoke His assistance, cast yourself in spirit at the foot of the cross, adore His goodness, inquire of Him often about your salvation, a thousand times in the day give Him your soul, fix your inward eyes upon His sweetness, stretch out your hand to Him, as a little child to his father, that He may lead you. Set Him like a bouquet of fragrant herbs upon your breast, implant Him like a standard in your soul, and make a thousand movements of your heart,

to the end that you may attain to the love of God, and a passionate and tender affection for His Divine Spouse.

"Thus the great St. Augustine made those ejaculatory prayers which he so assiduously counsels to the devout Lady Proba. Philothea, the spirit dwelling thus in a familiar intercourse with its God, will permeate itself with the perfume of His perfections. And this exercise is by no means difficult, for it may be interwoven with all our business and occupations without hindering them in the least, more especially as in this spiritual retreat, in these interior affections, we make only short digressions which in no way interfere with, but rather assist us in, our external pursuits. The pilgrim who halts a while and takes a little wine to gladden his heart and refresh his mouth is not thereby interrupting his journey; he rather assimilates strength in order to accomplish it more speedily and easily, resting only in order to go forward the better."

Oh, how blessed are those Christians who can thus remain recollected in a loving and uninterrupted union with God! They indeed taste how good the Lord is, and how gracious His conversation. Spiritual consolations flood their souls, and their hearts, ravished by all the beauties that they behold in the Well-Beloved, bind themselves to Him by strong and almost indissoluble bonds.

196. When souls who are still in the first effervescence of their new-born devotion feel these sensible consolations strongly, it is comparatively easy to obtain recollection from them. They willingly make efforts, and watch over themselves in order to preserve this peace which is such a source of sweetness for them. With regard to those who have been long in the illuminative life, and who maintain themselves therein by reason of the faith which they have acquired, the good habits which they have formed, and the virtues which they practise, rather than the spiritual delights with which their souls are no longer favoured as of old—these souls have not the same attraction for recollection. They readily give themselves up to outside things;

they yield themselves entirely to business, to the neglect of the exercise of God's presence. They think of Him, however, from time to time, only much less frequently, and especially less lovingly, than they should do. If they continue in this state, all serious progress becomes impossible. We must try, therefore, to bring them back to a life of *greater recollection*. "Would you not have everything to gain," we should say to them, "by living further removed from all these disturbances and distracting cares ? Some, I admit, are necessary and inevitable, but that is only another reason why you should avoid those which can be avoided ; and would you really dare to say that you conscientiously cut off everything which is of a nature to distract you ? Are you not too much given over to external affairs, too eager for news ? And, on the other hand, do you not neglect, under vain pretexts, those exercises which would favour recollection, cutting short your devotional reading too readily, for instance, when you would not deprive yourself of one line of your newspaper, or sacrifice a quarter of an hour's useless conversation ?"

When these Christians are able to forget the clamour of the world entirely—when, for instance, they make a serious retreat under solitary and peaceful conditions—they immediately feel its salutary effects. Their deep faith comes to life again ; they hear the voice of God, and the soul is filled with good thoughts and holy resolutions. This is a clear proof that if they would be careful to maintain themselves in habitual dispositions of recollection, controlling the imagination, and living more alone with God, they would make a rapid progress in fervour.

197. *Rule of Life*.—In the first part of this work we have already said that one of the best remedies for dissipation is the faithful observance of a rule of life. For well-disposed souls of this third degree a more defined and detailed rule is required than that which is suitable for mere beginners. This rule of life is not in excess of what may

rightly be expected of them, and it will be more in keeping with their needs.

The pious practices will be these : Besides the obligatory prayers, the daily recitation of five mysteries of the Rosary, which should be accompanied by the consideration or remembrance of the mysteries in question. Then mental prayer, performed while at work, if it cannot otherwise be managed, and ejaculatory prayer. Finally, examination of conscience, and the particular examination of the predominant failing.

If their occupations will allow of some devotional reading, especially the life of some Saint, even when these readings only last for a few minutes, it must be exacted. Nothing contributes more powerfully to the maintenance of a soul in recollection and fervour than spiritual reading. The imagination receives an excellent impression, the heart is filled with right feelings, which may endure, and thus exercise a happy influence over the whole conduct of life. In this way the unwelcome impressions caused by temporal cares will be counteracted and partly effaced ; in this way, too, the seed of the Divine Word will not be choked by the thorns—that is, by the absorbing business and distracting clamour of the world.

There are still two exercises of very great utility, but which it is not always possible to exact even from devout souls. These are daily assistance at Mass, and the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. The principle by which we may judge whether these should be imposed or not is this : What are the motives which would lead to their omission ? Is it a motive approved by God—such, for example, as the duties of the mother of a family, kept away by the care of her children—or is it, on the contrary, one inspired by purely human considerations, such as reluctance to be inconvenienced, or the fear of some slight persecution ? In the first it would be a mistake to impose a devotional practice which would prevent the performance of more urgent duties ; in the second it would be a misfortune to

deprive these souls of precious spiritual helps for such frivolous reasons.

198. With regard to the practice of virtues and the duties of our state, it is expedient that the rule should contain clear and practical directions concerning these important points.

The duties of our state are, in fact, an indication of God's particular designs for each one of His children. A captain posts his soldiers in different positions, and assigns a special function to each. He says to the one, "Go, and he goeth" (*Vade, et vadit*) ; to another, "Do this, and he doeth it" (*Fac hoc, et facit*) ; and the orderliness of the whole depends upon the execution of these different commands. So it is with the government of the world. The Creator has assigned a special task to each one of us. His Providence, which directs events, has placed us in the spot which is suitable for us, and where our appointed mission is to be found. The duty of our state—this is our work. When we perform it faithfully we carry out the Divine will, we accomplish the Divine command. Fathers and mothers of a family, employers and employed, masters and servants, priests and laymen, soldiers and magistrates—all must regard it as an honour and a consolation to do the work required of them by God. All must be resolved to obey Him, and to work for His glory. This is what makes the greatness, the importance, of the duty of our state, and renders the commonest occupations meritorious and holy. As the value of our actions depends upon the motive which inspires them, it will be necessary to insist upon purity of intention in the Rule—*Deus intuetur cor* (God regardeth the heart). Men, who only see the outside, appraise the merit by the success of any work. God, on the other hand, takes into consideration the intentions which cause its accomplishment. The most ordinary action performed through pure love has much greater value in His eyes than the most brilliant achievement which proceeds from a love which is imperfect or mingled with

natural and interested motives. Our work, therefore, would be but half done were we to urge faithfulness to the duties of the state in the Rule without laying stress upon the means by which this fidelity becomes meritorious. The frequentation of the Sacraments, the proper dispositions to be brought to them, the way in which the monthly retreats should be made, absolute fidelity to the annual retreat—these, again, are the fundamental principles of a good Rule.

199. Once determined, the Rule must be steadfastly observed, but without constraint. It must not be infringed capriciously, or from any human motive, nor must it be followed at the expense of other duties. It is certainly extremely useful thus to hold our liberty captive under the yoke of a Rule—*Qui regulæ vivit, Deo vivit.*¹ Recollection is thereby favoured or, rather, assured. The constant mortification of the will, which is thus thwarted in its independence and constrained to yield to the Divine will, a much more frequent recourse to God, such are the most precious fruits of a Rule well observed, and thus it is that it imprints a truly Christian stamp upon the whole life. It is by reason of these inexpressible advantages that certain directors require their penitents to render a daily account of the way in which their Rule is kept. A printed table, divided into columns, allows them to note down each evening the exactitude and also the perfection with which they have performed their different exercises. This method ensures regularity, maintains the soul in habits of piety, and forms a very safe preservative against the slackness which contact with the world so soon engenders.

¹ "He who lives for his Rule lives for God" (St. Gregory of Nyssa).

CHAPTER II

RENUNCIATION

§ I. *Mortification.*

200. "MORTIFICATION and humility must go hand in hand ; they are two sisters who must not be separated. . . . O sovereign virtues, mistresses of all creatures, queens of the world, you who deliver from all the snares and the traps of the devil, you who are so beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ ! He who possesses you may well set himself in battle array, and fight against the combined forces of hell. Let him fear no man, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to him, and what could he fear who counts the loss of all here below as naught, and who, when he has lost all, thinks that he has lost nothing ? One thing alone does he fear—to displease his God ; so he asks from Him to be strengthened in these two virtues, and not to lose them by his own fault.

" But how foolish am I to undertake to praise humility and mortification when the King of Glory has Himself praised them so highly, and consecrated them by His own sufferings ! Oh, my daughters, strive with their aid to leave the land of Egypt, for if you acquire them, you will find in them the heavenly manna which will impart a pleasant flavour to all things. Everything which appears most bitter to the people of this world (contempt, humiliations, privations, sufferings) will seem to you to be full of sweetness " (*Way of Perfection*, chaps. x., xi.).

So speaks St. Teresa, and all the Saints with her. To attain to piety it was necessary to do some violence to oneself, to struggle against self, to conquer it in many ways, perhaps even to sustain grievous conflicts. Failing these more or less painful efforts, we should never have come to taste the delights which God reserves for generous souls ; but in order to keep ourselves from backsliding, to

obtain afresh those sweets of piety which are so consoling, we must needs continue this warfare with self, and apply ourselves earnestly to mortification.

201. If we slacken, especially at the outset of the spiritual life, difficulties will quickly increase. To begin with, the further we go, the more we dread suffering. "He who does not swallow his repugnances," St. Francis of Sales used to say, "becomes more and more fastidious." We grow less eager in the strife. Meanwhile, old desires make themselves felt again, and the more they are listened to, the more imperious they become, and the sacrifices which God's service demands will therefore be found increasingly difficult.

On the other hand, graces will become less abundant. The soul, tormented by carnal instincts and appetites, filled with natural longings, preoccupations, and temporal cares, dominated by self-love, by the thirst for prosperity, or attachment to comfort, consumes the greater part of its days in vain imaginings, and no longer has the same strength by which it should mount up to God, or the same aptitude for receiving His communications and His graces. It has grown drowsy and incapable of any free and rapid progress on the spiritual road.

Attendite vobis, said Jesus to His disciples, *ne forte graventur corda vestra in crapula et ebrietate et curis hujus vitæ*—Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life (Luke xxi. 34).

Thus absorbed by worldly cares, not only are the avenues of the spirit all closed in advance against the Divine inspiration, but when it admits them they no longer find it docile as before. He who habitually seeks his own gratification in everything, and always gives way to his caprices, ends by loving his faults and losing all desire to get rid of them. Then he is deaf to reason ; he immediately rejects the most cogent arguments ; his will tyrannizes over his judgment ; he deceives himself intentionally, and remains a rebel to the solicitations of grace.

202. Mortification, on the contrary, sets the heart free, gives liberty to the soul, and a sounder judgment, and one more open to holy inspirations, to the Spirit. And then, again, the light of grace is usually in proportion to the degree of renunciation, because God is more favourably disposed to Christians who do penance.

By every sacrifice God is made dearer to us, and we dearer to God. God becomes dearer, because a sacrifice is an act of love, and because every act of charity increases this beautiful virtue within us. By loving, we learn to love. Again, it makes God dearer to us, because it detaches us from the creature, and because the heart, to which love is as essential as thought to the mind, will love God the more in proportion as it has less affection for earthly things—*Augmentum charitatis, diminutio cupiditatis* (St. Augustine).

Each sacrifice renders us dearer to God, Who loves those more by whom He is more beloved—*Ego diligentes me diligo*. And so it inclines Him to grant us more powerful and more abundant graces. Finally, mortification, whilst accustoming us to bow our will to the yoke of faith, makes all other virtues more easy to us : obedience, which is only the entire submission of our will to that of superiors ; humility, which is only the sacrifice of self-love ; charity, which consists in forgetfulness of self, in order to serve others ; and, above all, patience, which scarcely exists without mortification, for only those who have learnt by penance to die to themselves and all their attachments are able to take up their cross.

203. “It was by the constant practice of mortification that St. Dorotheus led his disciple Dositheus to a sublime degree of perfection, as he says himself in the life of his young pupil. This holy master set himself to discover even the trivial attachments which impeded Dositheus’s spiritual advancement, and when he perceived one he immediately endeavoured to subdue it, not ceasing to combat it until he had entirely conquered it. Then, when he saw that his disciple had mastered this first affection,

he passed on to another, to deliver him equally from that. When, for example, he noticed that Dositheus was very much attached to a book, a knife, or anything else, he immediately took it from him. When he perceived that he had a partiality for some well-executed piece of work, he did not even deign to look at it. When his pupil came and asked him a question, the answer to which might have been an occasion of vanity to him, he sent him away without even replying.

" Meanwhile, the other monks were struck with admiration, for they saw how Dositheus, who, because of his weak health, was unable either to fast or watch, or undergo the other austerities of community life, had nevertheless arrived at a very high degree of perfection. And when, urged on by holy curiosity, they asked him what were the virtues that he practised, he replied frankly : ' I mortify all my desires and submit my will.' In fact, by these interior mortifications alone he attained within the space of five years to so eminent a perfection that, after his death, he appeared all resplendent with glory among the most illustrious Saints of his Order. So true is it that mortification, which restrains the passions and disordered appetites, speedily leads to Christian perfection " (Scaramelli, *Directorium Asceticum*, part ii., art. vi., chap. iii.).

204. What we have said of recollection is equally true of mortification. It is easy enough to obtain the exercise of this virtue from souls who are experiencing the enthusiastic devotion of a nascent piety. As long as they are in the state of effervescence caused by the effusion of sensible graces, they find consolations and intimate joys which sweeten its bitterness and act as a powerful stimulus. They should always, however, be encouraged in it, for this generous practice of mortification, joined to a carefully maintained state of recollection, will greatly favour the workings of grace. It is thus that we may obtain " the grace, for example, of feeling interiorly a lively sorrow for our sins, bewailing them bitterly, or of shedding tears over

the griefs and sufferings which our Lord Jesus Christ endured in His Passion, or, again, the solution of some doubt" (St. Ignatius, *Exercises*, first week; Additions, first remark).

With regard to those souls who have grown old in piety, and whose spiritual progress seems arrested, it would be doing them a great service to persuade them of their need for mortification. As we have said, they are not entirely strangers to it, or they would very quickly sink lower. Thus, they often find opportunities for renunciation in the accomplishment of the duties of their state, in their fidelity to their exercises, in the practice of certain virtues. But a more generous mortification, practised with a more direct view to penance, would be an indispensable means to them, both of drawing down upon themselves a recrudescence of the graces which they so greatly need and of destroying the obstacles which stand in the way of their advancement.¹

205. Mortification is either bodily or spiritual, according as it operates upon the body or affects the will only. We distinguish also between negative mortification, which consists in not running after the sweets and delights of life, and positive mortification, which consists in the austerities which we inflict upon ourselves out of a spirit of penance.

Negative mortification is indispensable for those who propose to serve God generously. We cannot serve two masters. If we wish to gratify nature and yield to its requirements, we shall serve God badly.

But if this renouncement of natural pleasure is indispensable to piety, can we, as some would fain believe, limit our efforts, and remain entirely quiescent in the path of mortification? We should know very little of human nature if we thought to confine it in these narrow bounds. It may be said to be impossible to practise self-denial if we are not mortified. It would be a real feat in the spiritual domain to renounce everything, and yet deprive ourselves of nothing. To negative mortification must, then, be joined positive mortification, by which we mean

¹ See a list of mortifications at the end of vol. ii.

sacrifices undertaken voluntarily with the purpose of chastising and conquering nature.

What we have just said is equally applicable both to interior and exterior mortification. With regard to the latter, it cannot be denied that it is very useful and salutary, and frequently necessary if we would maintain ourselves in fervour. St. Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Francis of Sales in his *Devout Life*, enumerate the different kinds of austerity suitable for devout souls. And did not our Divine Model, Jesus Christ Himself, fast, watch, lie on the hard ground ? Did He not give over His body to the executioners ? And as the lives of Saints of all nations and ages witness, has not the Spirit of God always inspired docile souls with a holy hatred for their own bodies ? While bodily mortification is beneficial to all, it is particularly useful to those good but weak souls who in times of sadness and affliction are tempted to lose heart and become discouraged. Nothing could be more fatal than these feelings of bitter melancholy. "This evil sadness disturbs the soul, throws it into a state of anxiety, causes unreasonable fears and a distaste for prayer. It stupefies and overpowers the brain, deprives the soul of wisdom, resolution, judgment, and courage, and it overthrows its strength. In short, it is like a hard winter, which cuts off all the beauty of the earth, and benumbs the whole animal creation, for it takes all pleasure from the soul, and renders it almost crippled and powerless in all its faculties " (*Devout Life*, iv. 12).

Now, one of the remedies declared to be so effective by the holy Bishop of Geneva is precisely this bodily penance, "because this voluntary external affliction produces interior consolation, and the soul, experiencing outward pains, is distracted from those that are within" (*Devout Life*, iv. 12).

In a letter to St. Jane Frances de Chantal, St. Francis of Sales also advises the use of bodily penances as a remedy against temptation, and he gives a like reason. "It is

wonderful how this remedy (the discipline) has succeeded with a soul that I know. Doubtless, the outward sensation acts as a diversion to the inner pain and affliction, and provokes the mercy of God, while, in addition to this fact, the Evil One, seeing his partner and confederate, the flesh, chastised, is afraid, and takes to flight" (*Letter* of October 14, 1604).

206. Bodily mortification is also very useful to those Christians of a careless temperament, who certainly show an enlightened faith, real good-will, and a sincere desire to give themselves up to piety, but whose lack of ardour and softness of nature hinder them in the right way. Bodily mortification is their best means of acquiring a true generosity.¹

There are many occasions upon which this practice of positive mortification should be advocated.² "Impose sacrifices upon yourselves," we shall say, "be ingenious in finding them out, but do them out of love for our Lord; they will then cost you less and be more meritorious. Say to Jesus in all simplicity: 'I should like to give myself such a little pleasure, not to deprive myself of such a satisfaction, but I would rather please Thee, O my God, and I wish to show Thee that I love Thee much more than the thing that I am sacrificing to Thee.' If you are not capable of speaking thus to God, the reason is that your love for Him is very faint. If you care so little to do penance in reparation of your faults, you are hardly sorry for having offended Him. Do not say that these are mere details; for the least sacrifice, the most insignificant privation, becomes precious in the sight of God if the intention prompting it is holy, if you impose it upon yourself through a motive of love."

¹ Cf. Libermann, *Letter* of October 10, 1837.

² It is unnecessary to point out that a generous practice of the duties of our state, where any distasteful element is involved, is the first mortification to be imposed. This is a matter, not of counsel, but of precept.

§ 2. *Patience.*

207. He who will deprive himself of nothing, who never makes any sacrifices, will not be able to bear any trials, and this is why it is necessary first to have recourse to mortification, for it is, we believe, the surest means of conforming ourselves to patience. There is something in mortification which carries us further, which excites fervour in beginners more than simple resignation. Activity is pleasing to nature ; it is easier to hurl ourselves into the strife, and even to be our own executioners, than to stand resignedly, submissive to our appointed lot. So with most souls we consider that, in order to move them to piety, the best plan is first to ask some slight sacrifices of them, and thus bring them insensibly to deny themselves and to suffer for God.

But if generally more difficult to exercise, patience is only so much the more meritorious and beneficial. The sacrifices which Providence imposes upon us are better suited to our needs than those we choose of our own accord, and when they are generously accepted they greatly favour that delicate work called in ascetical language the despoiling of the old man, or death unto self.

208. Devout souls, having received a fuller light than beginners, will be more easily reached by exhortations addressed to them upon this subject. We should impress upon them, before all things, that their trials are willed, or, at least, allowed, by God, in His designs so full of goodness and wisdom. We must, therefore, always receive them as coming from Him, and lovingly kiss the hand which strikes us. “ If it depended only on me,” we might say to them, “ you would be very quickly relieved from this trouble ; but I should do wrong in so acting, since God, Who is wiser than I, and Who desires your welfare more, has otherwise ordained. Woe unto you if you reject this cross, or are unwilling to profit by it. It would be refusing God’s guidance, bringing to naught His designs

for you, wandering from the road by which He wishes to lead you, and running the risk of going astray and getting lost. To flee from the cross is to flee from grace. But you know all this, and I am saying nothing new. You have often told God in the full sincerity of your heart that you would consent to anything for love of Him ; and, indeed, how many sacrifices have you not already made, how many times have you not bent your head patiently beneath the chastising rod ? This trial seems harder, but it is also more sanctifying, and God, Who bestows His grace in proportion to our needs, is quite ready to grant you more help. This superabundant help you will obtain if you pray, but you must pray perseveringly. You think yourself too weak ; then say to God, like St. Augustine : *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis* (Impose upon me, my God, all the sacrifices Thou wilt, but give me the strength to accomplish them). Ah ! you cannot deny the truth of my words. Do you not hear, deep down in your heart, a voice which tells you the same things, which also preaches to you patience and renunciation ? That voice is the voice of God. Will you close your ears to His gentle exhortations, and listen to the counsels of the devil, who urges you to impatience and rebellion ? ‘ True,’ they will answer ; ‘ but my patience is at an end. Must I always suffer in this way ? ’ Come ! away with these thoughts. No anxieties for the morrow ! Jesus Himself has forbidden it. ‘ Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ Do not distrust your heavenly Father. Rest upon Him as a child rests upon its mother’s breast, casting all your care upon Him. It would, indeed, wound Him to the heart did you doubt His goodness and His fatherly Providence.”

All the motives of Christian patience are admirably expressed in a well-known little work by the Blessed Louis Grignon de Montfort—*A Letter to the Friends of the Cross*. Its perusal cannot be too much recommended to devout souls. But what will uphold them more than anything else is love of the crucified Jesus. Meditation upon the

sufferings of our Lord is necessary for every one during their time of trial, and nowhere better than at Calvary shall we find patience and courage.

209. When the trial seems more than we can bear we should strive to put away the thought of it as far as possible, and to distract ourselves by thinking of something else. Imagination, indeed, only serves to increase our grief. It is certainly difficult to overcome this vagrant faculty. "Just as," says St. Teresa (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. i.), "we cannot arrest the progress of the heavenly bodies which travel at such a prodigious speed, so neither can we check the movements of the imagination." Nevertheless, we can to some extent divert its course, and apply it to other ideas and other preoccupations. This is what we must strive to do in moments of weariness. Avoid all dreaming, and endeavour to keep our minds constantly and usefully employed. Even if we only partially succeed, the least results so gained would be good, and would be so much in the direction of calm and peace of heart.

And especially in cases of anger and hatred towards our neighbour is it necessary to banish those bitter memories which possess the imagination. When a penitent who is a prey to active resentment complains that he cannot forgive, he must, before everything, be made to understand that it is his duty to do so, and that he must forgive if he wants God to forgive him; that Jesus Christ, Who has pardoned him so many times, has a right to demand this sacrifice from him. The director will require him to pray for the person of whom he has so much to complain, but especially will he show him that forgetfulness of injuries will be much more easy if he sets to work to reject all these bitter thoughts as soon as they present themselves, just as one would put away impure thoughts.

210. Without going so far as these temptations to aversion and hatred, there is another very common trial with devout souls, and which may be considered in the train of those just mentioned—this is having differences with

the members of their households. Here, again, patience is very necessary. Diversities of character, divergencies of opinion, contradictions, criticisms, reproaches with more or less truth in them—all these have a great place in human lives. The devil knows how to profit by them, recalling ceaselessly to the mind the memory of the injuries and reasons for dissatisfaction which we believe ourselves to have. He inspires feelings of bitterness which seem insurmountable. The first advice to be given is the same as in the preceding case. “ You think too much about your troubles. By dwelling upon them perpetually you never diminish them, but, on the contrary, you only magnify them, making both the forgiveness of the wrongs and the exercise of the holy virtues of gentleness and charity much more difficult. It may be that the demands made upon you, the burdens laid upon you, the annoyances to which you are subjected, are very unreasonable ; but the more this is so, the greater your merit in accepting them for the love of Jesus.”

It is hardly credible to how great an extent these trials (light enough in themselves, but often most intolerably frequent, or, rather, continuous) serve for the advancement of generous souls, causing them to produce a multitude of acts of renunciation and love.

If souls who are too fond of themselves should be thus exhorted to patience, we must, on the other hand, comfort those who, while entirely submissive to the Divine will, have a false and mistaken idea of Christian resignation. “ Do not refrain from complaining,” wrote St. Francis of Sales to an invalid lady ; “ but I should wish it to be to God, in a child-like spirit, like a little child to his mother ; for, provided that it is done lovingly, there is no harm either in complaining or in asking to be relieved, either in changing one’s place of abode or in seeking solace. Only let it be done with love and resignation in the arms of God’s good pleasure.”

CHAPTER III

HUMILITY

1. Ordinary humility and the humility of perfection—The director must inculcate the principles of humility, make his penitents feel their need of it, and show the great advantage accruing therefrom.
2. ACCORDING to what we have hitherto said, the sensible graces, which capture the heart and attach it firmly to God's service, are especially abundant in those who lead a recollected and mortified life ; but these sweetneses, which God gives us to incite us to prayer and renunciation, may become dangerous ; they may develop self-love and furnish food for pride. Even when they do not actually quicken it, if they do not lessen pride, if the soul does not take the opportunity of getting to know its failings better and of owning its nothingness, the effects of this grace of devotion will be much attenuated, and the soul's progress towards perfection will soon be stayed.

Humility, then, is indispensable ; if it accompanies mortification, the Divine graces will become more and more powerful—*Deus humilibus dat gratiam*—and its advance will be rapid and assured.

The humility which must be inculcated in these devout souls is not only the ordinary humility of general precept, because all, even everyday Christians, understand its necessity. Common humility, in fact, consists in not thinking ourselves great, and in not getting ourselves admired and praised for qualities which we do not possess, or for trifling advantages which are evidently not worthy of any esteem, such as dress and luxury. It consists also in not setting ourselves above others, or despising them, and also in accepting without bitterness, from those whose charge and mission it is to administer them, the blame and reproaches which we have drawn upon ourselves by our faults.

But there is a more perfect humility which supposes a

more delicate knowledge than that possessed by the rank and file, and in which souls may consequently be lacking without sin, not understanding the obligation. This is the humility of perfection. In order to practise it we must not only refrain from making our good qualities an occasion for self-aggrandisement, but we must have a mean opinion of ourselves, being well pleased that others should share this poor opinion with us, and testify their little respect for us by their lack of regard, or even by contempt.

212. It is to this further degree of humility that devout souls must be brought if we wish to consolidate their piety and lead them on to fervour.

This, truly, is not an easy task. It has been rightly said of this kind of humility that, unknown to the philosophers of antiquity, it was a virtue reserved for Christianity. It is above the powers of nature ; but He Who came to teach the world by His example and precepts, He Who said of Himself, *Ego sum vermis et non homo, opprobrium hominum et abjectio plebis*,¹ the God Who so effaced Himself as to take upon Himself the form of a servant, gives these feelings of perfect humility to willing hearts, and fashions them thus after His own likeness.

The director's first care must be to inculcate in his penitents the principles of humility, by requiring them frequently to dwell upon them, in order that they may be quite penetrated by them and convinced of them, as we are of the first truths of religion, with regard to which we never have any doubt. This is the great principle of humility so well expressed by St. Paul : *Quid habes quod non accepisti ? Si autem accepisti, quid gloriari quasi non acceperis ?*² Our few good qualities, which, moreover, we are always liable to exaggerate, do not come from ourselves, but from God. Our only real possessions are our failings and our sins.

¹ "But I am a worm, and no man : the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people" (Ps. xxi. 7).

² "What hast thou that thou hast not received ? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?" (1 Cor. iv. 7).

"Alas," says St. Francis of Sales (*Devout Life*, iii. 5), "do mules cease to be clumsy and filthy beasts because they are loaded with the precious and perfumed treasures of princes?"

213. Spiritual writers go at great length into all the reasons which we have for humility: how of ourselves we are nothing, we possess nothing, are worth nothing, and, finally, are sinners. As we are not writing a treatise on humility, we will not expatiate upon these grounds.¹ We shall merely say that the director must be thoroughly acquainted with them, in order that he may frequently show to such of his penitents as are already pious how vain and foolish a thing this self-esteem is.

The spiritual father must also apply himself to lessening the spirit of pride in his children by his way of dealing with them. Not that he should treat them roughly, for they would not yet be sufficiently strong to bear this trial profitably; but he should not show them any exaggerated admiration or esteem. Further, let him draw their attention to their self-love, for it is a defect into which beginners usually slide unconsciously. When they have failed in some way, and this fault, as often happens, proceeds from want of humility, he will show them their wrongdoing gently but firmly. He will make them admit it by pointing out how far from perfect they are, and how, had they desired it, they could, by the aid of prayer and humility, have avoided this fall. He will say: "I am not at all astonished at your weakness. I know your good points, but I know also how much pride and self-esteem still remain in you. You yourself will admit that humility is not your predominant virtue. How good it would be to be able to recognize our unworthiness, and out of love for Jesus, Who also suffered humiliation, to put up with contradictions and humiliations! Oh, how holy are the humble souls! how much they are beloved by God! How good it is to say with the Saints: 'Lord, I willingly consent to suffer

¹ See upon this subject M. Olier, *Introduction aux Vertus Chrétiennes*. It is admirable in its lucidity and depth.

and to be despised for Thy sake' ! (*Domine pati et contemni pro te*).¹ It is not as difficult as you might think to attain to this humility—to have an ardent love for Him Who is so lovable will suffice. The love of Jesus makes all trials and humiliations sweet. Pray and love, and you will become great in humility."

If there is any fear lest these penitents should give themselves up to vain feelings of self-satisfaction, the director will point to the examples of those whose virtues are more perfect, whose merits surpass their own—those who have worked, suffered, and merited more for God ; or, again, whilst encouraging them and rejoicing with them over their small efforts, he should remind them how very little it all is compared with God's perfections. Oh, if we but understood how good, how perfect, how lovable Almighty God is, what much greater sacrifices we should perform for Him without any difficulty !

Again, he will show them what they could and what they should have done if they had been faithful to the special graces which have been accorded to them—if they had responded to God's all-merciful designs with regard to them.

214. We have just said that, whilst showing these devout souls their need of humility, we should also show them all its charm and advantage. In fact, to cause this beautiful virtue to be esteemed and desired, and to lead Christians to pray for it ardently and insistently, is one of the most important duties of a director. We must, then, remind them of the high place which humility held in the opinion of all the Saints, how they are all agreed in representing it as the foundation of holiness—*sanctitatis fundamentum* (St. Cyprian) ; the first virtue of Christians—*prima virtus christianorum* (St. Jerome) ; the guardian of all the virtues (St. Bernard). Just as pride is the beginning of all sin—*initium omnis peccati superbia* (Eccl. x. 15)—the capital sin amongst capital sins, so humility is a capital virtue,

¹ The reply of St. John of the Cross to our Lord when he was asked what reward he desired (see his Office in the Breviary).

and the foundation of all the others. St. Athanasius, in his *Life of St. Antony*, relates how the Lord once showed the holy monk the whole world covered with pitfalls and snares, and when, alarmed by the sight of so many and great dangers, Antony asked how he might escape them : "By humility," was the answer that he received.

"Humility and charity," wrote St. Francis of Sales, "are the mistresses of all the virtues ; the others follow, as chickens run after the mother hen." It must also be remembered what a special love our Lord has always had for the humble, how dear this virtue makes us to the Heart of Jesus—dear also to the heart of Mary—so that the highest places in heaven are reserved for those who shall have humbled themselves most here below : *Qui se humiliat, exaltabitur.*

Happy are they who have formed a high idea of humility, who desire it and seek for it as the precious pearl of the Gospel, who make lively and constant supplication to God in order to obtain it. It is the surest road to humility, and persevering prayer will do more towards the acquisition of this superhuman virtue than all worldly methods put together. And, in order to make his children understand this better, when they ask his prayers, the spiritual father will sometimes do well to reply : "Yes, I will pray for you, I will implore God to make you very humble, even although, in order to achieve this, He must subject you to severe humiliations."

2. *The Practice of Humility.*—Firstly, to admit our abasement ; secondly, to consent that others should recognize it, and to sacrifice their esteem ; thirdly, to accept humiliations.

215. We do not, however, mean to say that prayer must be employed to the exclusion of every other method. It is by no means useless to strive to produce acts of humility. *Humiliatio est via ad humilitatem sicut lectio ad scientiam* (We become humble by humiliating ourselves, just as we become learned by studying). These attempts to humble ourselves are very praiseworthy, and, besides, what soul is there possessing good-will who would sincerely ask our

Lord for the virtue of humility without endeavouring to produce acts of humility ?

The first way of exercising humility is to recognize our own insignificance, or, as St. Francis of Sales says, to love our abjection (*Devout Life*, iii. 6). We are nothing ; let us confess our nothingness with a good grace, and, instead of getting angry at seeing ourselves infirm, miserable, and subject to all kinds of weaknesses, imperfections, and sins, let us admit in all sincerity that it is a great grace of God that we are not still worse ; and let us even rejoice that we have nothing good in us except that which is instilled into us by God. This is what we must remind those who are vexed and angry with themselves, those who are astonished at their falls, or who give way to vain anxieties and discouragement. What is lacking in these Christians, who are so given over to gloomy thoughts, is the love of their abjection. A large share of self-love and pride enters, unknown to them, into their anxious desires to be rid of their infirmities.

. 216. If we have a poor opinion of ourselves and treat ourselves accordingly, it will be easy to accept it cheerfully when others have the same opinion of us ; and the second method of practising humility consists in thus renouncing the esteem of others.

Our first advice on this point is to repress, vigorously and constantly, the desires and preoccupations of vainglory which spring up so spontaneously within the human heart. We must, then, reject, the instant we become aware of it, every desire to be admired or esteemed, to pass for clever, amiable, intelligent, pious, etc. We shall not linger over those childish dreams in which we imagine conversations and events wherein we always take the hero's part. Nor shall we consent to the desire to be sought after, consulted, and even approved of.

Finally, we must struggle against a very ordinary consideration in souls given up to vanity, and which too frequently influences their conduct : "What will they say ? what will they think of me ?" Is it not better to say

with St. Paul, "I care little for the judgment of creatures ; I only wish to seek to please God" (*Parum est mihi ut a vobis judicer . . . qui autem judicat me, Dominus est*) ?

The renunciation of the esteem of others will be practised in speech by the cutting off of all boasting, or of every word which tends to make us thought well of, and in action by the care we shall take not to display ostentatiously, and even to hide, the good that is in us, or anything of a nature calculated to excite the admiration and praise of our neighbour.

217. The third way of practising humility consists in the acceptance of humiliations and contempt. To excuse ourselves temperately only and without bitterness, and sometimes even not to excuse ourselves at all ; to bear patiently all humiliating circumstances, such as snubs, occasions where we are made to appear ridiculous, rebukes, rebuffs, criticisms, mockery, with the thought that we have richly deserved them by our infidelities, and even to look upon them as blessings from God Who wishes to make us gain great merit, and that we may become like unto Jesus—such are the different points of this third way of humility, which may be called passive humility.

Finally, in order to attain to the practice in its perfection of a virtue so difficult to nature as this virtue of humility, the devout soul must often consider the example of Jesus Christ, scoffed at, mocked, spit upon, insulted in every way, and for our sakes.

CHAPTER IV

PROBATIONS ON VARIOUS VIRTUES

218. YEARS pass before the soul emerges from the illuminative life ; during this period we must keep up its ardour and maintain it in vigilance and strife with self. It is true that the three great virtues of which we have spoken—recollection, mortification, and humility—may be the cause

of its making considerable progress, and may even bring it to the unitive life. But will it always practise them with the same fidelity? In this illuminative state, where the senses play a great part, is it not to be feared that the soul will fall into routine and sink gradually to sleep? For, as we have shown, sensible fervour, unlike that calm but strong fervour of perfect souls, is subject to many imperfections, and needs to be perpetually rekindled. The ardour, then, of pious souls, and their somewhat fluctuating activity, requires constantly to be kept alive under pain of evaporating entirely, and giving place to a dangerous relaxation.

On the other hand, their renunciation is usually imperfect, either because their hearts have not been in it from the beginning, or because many almost invisible attachments still remain which escape their own notice, and from which they never think of setting themselves free.

To remedy this double inconvenience, certain directors, in these days especially,¹ have recourse to what they call *probations*. Each probation is a system of exercises, which, by presenting one virtue under all its aspects, reveals its full intensity and scope. While the soul is thus kept on

¹ This method of direction was explained and popularized by M. l'Abbé Chaumont, Canon of Paris, of holy memory (died May 15, 1896); it is not, however, a new invention. The particular examen practised according to the method of St. Ignatius is really the same thing. With regard to making the particular examen and other exercises converge towards the same end, Rodriguez had already counselled it, relying upon the authority of Cassian :

"It is also very useful to take for the particular examen the same subject that has already been taken for prayer, and in this way to join prayer and examination, because then, our exercises all tending in the same direction, we can make greater progress. But Cassian goes still further and wishes" (*Collat.*, IX., chap. xxxv.) "that not only in the examination and in prayer we should insist upon what is most necessary for us, but that several times during the day we should raise our spirit to God with short and energetic prayers, with sighs and groanings of heart, and that to that, again, we should add penances, mortifications, and particular devotions in order to obtain it" (*On Prayer*, chap. xv.).

the alert by a comprehensive variety (for its attention is successively directed upon the different virtues), it acquires an increasingly exact, an increasingly complete, understanding of perfect self-denial. The results will obviously be more certain and complete if the spiritual father himself controls and directs the work.

219. The probation can be summed up as follows :

- (1) To make one particular virtue the object of our prayers, meditations, and Communions.
- (2) To strive to practise the acts of this virtue.
- (3) To examine ourselves daily upon our fidelity to this virtue.

(4) To report to our director on the progress made.

For this purpose each of these points should be taken separately, and we should state—

- (1) Have we prayed earnestly for this virtue, made it the subject of our meditation, proposed its acquirement as the intention of our Communions, rosaries, etc. ?
- (2) How have we practised it ? in what way striven after it ? by what means pursued it ? how often and in what circumstances have we been faithful to it ?
- (3) Have we renewed our resolutions every morning, examined ourselves on this point every evening ?
- (4) Do we esteem this virtue more highly, desire it more ardently ? Have we made definite and energetic resolutions with regard to it ?
- (5) Have we progressed or gone back, and to what cause do we attribute this result ?

Written down, with the aid of a set of questions, this report demands more attention, and also gives better results.

In order to obtain more profit from these exercises, it is good to have at hand some spiritual books treating particularly of the proposed virtue.

Besides those virtues—recollection, mortification, patience, humility—the importance of which we have pointed out, probations may have reference to the spirit of prayer, obedience, brotherly love, the spirit of detach-

ment and poverty, chastity, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament or to our Lady.

To show how each of these virtues should be considered under its different aspects, and to study the various manners of practising it, we give a few examples.

Recollection, and Union with God.

220. Recollection consists in two things : (1) To close the heart as much as possible to the cares and turmoil of the world, and (2) to open it on the side of heaven.

I. (1) To shun all distracting occupations, noisy amusement, purposeless visits, prolonged conversations, useless speech, searching after news, profane and idle reading.

(2) To be careful to regulate our behaviour by avoiding in our movements, gait, glances, and all our actions, everything that favours dissipation.

(3) To cut short all day-dreaming, and repress all that work of the imagination, those anxieties, preoccupations, schemes, projects, calculations, those memories in which we always say the same things to ourselves, thereby wasting much precious time and encouraging many defects unconsciously.

II. (4) At once upon awaking to think of God as being near to us ; during the day, whenever we hear the clock strike, to repeat this exercise, taking care to join an act of adoration and love to this remembrance of His presence. It would also be well to ask for grace to serve Him rightly and faithfully, and to keep the resolutions which we have made.

(5) To substitute pious thoughts and short and affectionate outpourings of the heart for those useless thoughts which we have learnt to restrain, and this particularly at times when the mind is free and unoccupied, when coming and going, or travelling.

(6) To do everything for God. Frequently to call to mind the supernatural motives which should inspire the whole conduct of a Christian soul. God requires this of me. O God, I rejoice, even in my least actions, to do Thy holy will.

Prayer—Resolutions and Examen on the Manner of Praying.

221. Prayer to be good must be—

(1) *Attentive*.—“ Before praying,” the Holy Spirit tells us, “ prepare thy soul, and tempt not the Lord.”

It is to tempt God, therefore, to begin to pray without preparation—to pray, that is, without being first recollected, without having emptied the imagination of all useless thoughts, without having penetrated ourselves with the greatness of God, the sublime majesty of Him Whom we are addressing, and without having at least glanced upon the immensity of our own needs.

(2) *Humble*.—Convinced of my own nothingness and misery, filled with confusion at the sight of my countless infidelities, I will admit my unworthiness and abase myself profoundly before God. “ God resisteth the proud : He giveth grace to the humble.”

(3) *Trustful*.—I will remember the goodness of God, more desirous of my welfare than I am myself ; the merits of Jesus Christ, on which I found all my hope. Never will I be discouraged on the pretext that I do not obtain what I wish for quickly enough. Discouragement is a snare of the devil ; invincible faith is a sure means of being heard. “ All things, whatsoever ye ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive ; and they shall come unto you ” (Mark xi. 24).

(4) *Fervent*.—He prays well who ardently desires to be heard ; he prays badly whose heart is not in his prayer, who expresses no real desires to our Lord, and only prays, so to speak, reluctantly, like one performing an unwelcome duty. In order to maintain my fervour and to avoid routine, I will always propose an intention which is quite definite and adapted to my spiritual needs, and this either in my private prayers or other devotional exercises, such as assistance at Mass, etc.

(5) *Persevering*.—I will not cease to pray, returning to the charge without slackening, however much God may delay in

hearing me. Jesus Christ has said that we must pray in such a manner as to weary, to importune, if it were possible, our Heavenly Father.

Under circumstances where prayer is particularly difficult to me, and I find it almost impossible to fix my attention, even then I will not relax my efforts, remembering that what God requires of us is not the victory, but the conflict, and that a prayer full of aridity and dryness, made up of continual distractions which we incessantly try to repel without success, is usually more pleasing to God and more fruitful to the soul than one full of sweetness and consolation.

In order to learn to pray well, I will strive to give to my prayer each of the above-named qualities successively. So, on Monday I will try to pray with attention, on Tuesday with humility, on Wednesday with great confidence, etc. ; or, which would be better, and would help me to form more settled habits, I will direct my efforts for a whole week to each one of these points. At fixed times I will examine myself, to see if I am faithful to the day's resolution.

Resolutions and Examen on Humility.

"Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine."

222. It is to humble souls, says the Holy Spirit, that God grants His blessings. The prayer of the humble, we are told again, is all-powerful with the Heart of God. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," Jesus Christ has said.

In order that I may acquire this great virtue of humility, as important as it is difficult of attainment, I will take the following points successively as a subject for my resolutions and matter for self-examination.

(1) *Self-Knowledge*.—I will learn to know myself, to think often of my nothingness. I will remember my faults

weaknesses, languors, countless negligences, my continual unfaithfulness to grace, and I will try thus to obtain a profound and habitual inward conviction regarding the sad state of my soul.

I will occupy myself particularly with these thoughts—

(a) When I am tempted to be self-satisfied, and to fancy myself better than others.

(b) When I am preparing to pray, abasing myself thus humbly before God ; at the beginning of Holy Mass, for instance, or of my meditation, at my visits to the Blessed Sacrament or when about to recite the Rosary.

(c) Immediately after committing any fault.

(2) *In my Relations with my Neighbour.*—To compare myself with those who are obviously better than I am, in order that I may not exalt myself foolishly over others ; to consider their good qualities and excuse their faults ; never to lose sight of my own failings, both visible and secret : in God's eyes I am perhaps more ungrateful and reprehensible than those whom I despise.

(3) *Wishes.*—I will reject, as soon as I perceive it, every wish to be admired or esteemed. I will not want to be thought clever, pleasant, intelligent, good, pious, etc. If such a thought of vanity steals into my mind, I will renounce it instantly, and ask God to deliver me from it. I will not stop to reflect that this or that may make me esteemed, nor will I make up conversations or scenes in my imagination in which I always give myself the principal part.

(4) *Self-Love.*—I will not wish to be sought after, consulted, or even approved of.

(5) *Self-Esteem.*—Instead of feeling injured and uttering complaints or blame when others disagree with me or take some step of which I disapprove, I will humble myself interiorly, saying to myself that I know nothing about it, and that it would be foolish pride on my part to put my opinion before that of others.

(6) *Humility in Speech.*—I will speak readily of the good

qualities of others, and try to make them well thought of, especially such persons as are least attractive to me, or with regard to whom I have any feelings of jealousy.

(7) I will never say anything in praise of myself, not even a word which might tend to raise me in the esteem of others, or which redounds to my own credit.

(8) I will not justify myself when reproved or blamed. Should I think it my duty to do so, I will speak gently and without bitterness.

(9) I will readily say things which might expose me to shame, admitting my faults simply. I will honestly lay bare to my director the most secret recesses of my soul, no matter what embarrassment I may feel in so doing.

(10) *Humility in Conduct*.—I will do nothing from human respect, in order to draw attention to myself and win approval, saying to myself, like St. Paul : “To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you.” I am concerned with pleasing God only.

(11) *Acts of Humility*.—I will rejoice and thank God whenever I have any menial and disagreeable office to perform. I will be humble in my bearing, glad sometimes to wear old and ordinary-looking clothes. At night I will kiss the ground and humbly implore God’s pardon.

(12) I will treat those about me with the same deference as if they were my superiors and I their servant.

(13) I will choose the lowest places for myself, the least of everything, and what no one else wishes for.

(14) *Passive Humility*.—I will accept, not only patiently, but joyfully, and with thanks to God, all opportunities for humility which may come to me, such as moments of embarrassment, criticisms, reprimands, rebuffs, mockery, slander, calumnies, believing that these trials (over and above the fact that I deserve them for my infidelities) are the greatest grace which God can give me.

(15) *Our Lord’s Example*.—I will frequently think of the example of Jesus, scoffed at, mocked, spit upon, insulted in every way.

(16) *Prayer*.—I will ask God ceaselessly for the virtue of humility, in my prayers, rosaries, and Communions, invoking with that intent the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, my good Angel, my patron Saints. I will practise numerous acts of self-denial with the same intention.

(17) *Penalties*.—I will examine myself twice daily with regard to humility, and will punish myself by some act of penance whenever during the day I find myself transgressing.

Way of Attaining to Perfect Obedience.

223. (1) *To Obey for God*.—To say often to myself : “It is God Himself Who commands.” To think of heaven open, and God Himself giving me such or such an order. When the hour comes for fulfilling any obligation or duty of my state, or when a superior speaks to me, to say, “This is God’s will. *Fiat voluntas tua.*”

(2) *To Obey Promptly*.—Not to delay a minute ; to leave my work half done immediately the bell rings (if in a house which is subject to a Rule) or at the first word from my superiors ; to forestall the orders and carry out the wishes of my superiors as soon as I become aware of them.

(3) *To Obey Always*.—To propose to myself this motive of obedience in all my actions. To rise by obedience, to work, to eat and drink and to pray by obedience, to go to recreation, for my walks, to confession, to the Holy Table, etc., by obedience.

(4) *To Obey Simply, Blindly*.—Never to argue anything with my superiors, never to utter a word against authority, never to dispute an order, even interiorly.

(5) *To Obey Joyfully*.—Never to manifest any repugnance. To compel myself to appear cheerful and happy, no matter how hard the order that I have to carry out.

(6) *To Obey like Jesus Christ*.—Constantly to remind myself how Jesus chose to be obedient to Joseph, to Mary,

during thirty years, to His Heavenly Father. "It is My meat, it is My life," He said, "to do My Father's will." "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

(7) *Prayer for Obtaining this Obedience.*—To pray daily for this virtue to the Sacred Heart, to Mary, to Joseph, to my patron Saints and my guardian Angel; also to offer some sacrifice to God daily with the object of obtaining this precious grace.

To take each of these resolutions in succession—for example, the first on Monday, the second on Tuesday, etc.—or, what would be better, to take each subject for a week in turn. To examine myself at least once daily concerning my resolution of the morning.

The Exercise of Fraternal Charity.

224. In order to acquire this beautiful virtue, in all its perfection, and to conduct myself towards those around me like a true Christian, I will keep the following resolutions :

(1) I will consider them all as brethren, as souls beloved by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, called to heaven like myself. I will dwell on these thoughts more especially when I am tempted to give way to feelings of antipathy, jealousy, or revenge.

(2) I will bear with the failings of others, not calling attention to them, and carefully abstaining from every kind of criticism and slander.

(3) I will never carry tales to anyone, especially if it is anything likely to give him pain. On the contrary, I will strive to make peace everywhere, bringing forward people's good qualities, hiding their faults, doing everything to lead them to love one another.

(4) I will treat every one with affection, taking care not to grieve anyone, and immediately getting reconciled if I have been angry.

(5) I will grant all requests made to me, not being afraid of giving myself trouble in order to oblige others ; and if I am forced to say no, against my will, I will try to make my refusal acceptable by kind words.

(6) Out of affection for those about me I will seek first the good of their souls. For this purpose I will pray earnestly to God either for them all in general, or more particularly for those whom I see standing in great need of my prayers. In this latter case I will even offer some sacrifices to God, that His grace may more surely descend upon the souls who are so dear to our Lord.

(7) Not satisfied with praying, I will strive to benefit them by my example and words. If I see my brethren afflicted, I will share their troubles, and console them and keep up their courage. Above all, I will give them good and salutary advice when a fitting opportunity occurs, leading them to avoid offending God, and to practise virtue.

Detachment and Poverty.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."—MATT. v. 3.

225. (1) He who is really detached does not regard himself as an owner who is free to make either a good or bad use of his wealth, but as a poor servant ; all that he has having been entrusted to him by his Master, in Whose interests alone it may be employed, and owing to this Master, who will also be his Judge, an exact account of the use to which he shall have put it.

(2) The goods of which we make use here below are either necessary, convenient, or superfluous. The truly poor man is satisfied with what is necessary. The merely convenient he willingly forgoes, and only procures it when it conduces to the performance of the duties of his state. Finally, the superfluous he renounces absolutely. These principles will be applied to food, furniture, clothes, travelling, etc.

(3) The man who is truly poor suffers privation with a good grace. When his Divine Master allows him to want for necessaries, he gladly endures, as our Saviour did, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, labours, fatigue, etc.

(4) He does not squander indiscriminately the goods which God has placed at his disposal. He does not lose them, or allow them to deteriorate by his negligence.

(5) *In the Case of Seculars.*—If the truly poor man is economical, it is by no means that he may save up that of which he is so careful, but in order to give the more abundantly. “Money never stays in his hands, and he is always ready to part with it when he comes to the conclusion that God demands it of him” (Tronson).

(6) The obstacle to this holy poverty often springs from the fear of want. The truly poor in spirit is full of confidence in Providence, and does not show that excessive care for the morrow which our Lord condemns.

(7) *For Regulars.*—He who has the perfect spirit of poverty neither takes nor asks, neither gives nor lends, anything without permission.

Devotion to our Blessed Lady.

226. This probation may be made during the month of May. We divide the subject under four heads—one for each week—and this time the form chosen is that of questions for self-examination.

(1) *Confidence.*—The more confidence we have in Mary, the more devout we are to her. Have I had a boundless confidence in my good Mother? Have I realized that the true child of Mary is sure of salvation, sure even of sanctification? Have I looked upon devotion towards her as one of the most powerful means of advancement in piety? What have I done specially to-day to augment my confidence? I might have meditated upon her greatness, recalled her benefits, read some work written in her honour. Finally, have I asked God to increase my devotion and

my trust in my heavenly Mother? Have I made use of any of these means?

(2) *Filial Affection*.—Have I dealt with her as a child with his mother, telling her all that concerns me, confiding my joys, troubles, anxieties, and desires to her, speaking to her of my failings, so that she may help me to correct them; of the virtues which I need, in order that she may help me to acquire them?

(3) *Unwavering Devotion*.—Have I had recourse to her on all occasions, undertaking no new thing without recommending it to her? Have I offered her my work, that she may offer it herself to Jesus? In the same way, have I offered all my actions to her? The Blessed Louis Grignon de Montfort earnestly advises us to offer everything to Mary, and declares that this practice is an infallible secret for arriving at a high perfection. Have I particularly invoked her assistance before Confession and Communion, begging her to lead me, as it were, by the hand in these two great and holy actions? Above all, have I had recourse to her in my temptations?

(4) *Pious Practices in her Honour*.—How have I paid my daily tribute of homage to this dear Mother, and how have I recited the prayers in her honour—the Rosary, the *Memorare*, the *Angelus*, etc.? Do I sometimes make novenas to her, in order to obtain the graces necessary to me—some virtue, for instance, of which I feel more specially in need? Have I joined some acts of mortification to my prayers, so as to make these novenas more efficacious, and to honour Mary more? Have I not been inconstant in my devotion towards this dear Mother, sometimes having recourse to her eagerly, then forgetting her, and entirely neglecting to pray to her?

227. These examples will be sufficient to explain this system of direction by means of probations. It is a good plan to take these different probations at intervals—making them last a month, for example, then leaving an interval of one or two months between the one just com-

pleted and the next. In these intervals we may apply ourselves especially to an exact and perfect practice of our Rule, and make this regularity the subject of our particular examinations.

Finally, we may recommence the cycle, which, by reason of the intervals left between the different probations, will have lasted several years. At the end of two or three years it will not be amiss to return to the study of each one of these virtues, which are the foundations of the spiritual life.

Further, according to the advice of St. Francis of Sales (*Devout Life*, iii. 1), we might choose the virtue for which we feel most aptitude or attraction, or of which we most feel the need, and spend a longer time over it.

228. Here we see a complete method, which certainly has its advantages, and which has produced good results in a number of souls. It is quite true, also, that it would be a mistake to compel every one without distinction to follow such a rigid method. Many souls, too, would rebel.¹ Indeed, such a systematic plan of sanctification presupposes a real good-will. Souls which are still in the purgative life, and even many Christians in the illuminative life, would not have the constancy of purpose to accept this kind of direction, and by wishing to impose it we should run the risk of disheartening them instead of promoting their advancement.

As for those ardent souls who are capable of prolonged perseverance, another difficulty often presents itself—the action of the Holy Spirit, Who illumines them as to their

¹ "There are," says Father Surin, "directors who get an idea and a plan into their heads, which they think much of, and henceforth apply it to all the souls which come to them, thinking that they will do something great if they can bring them into line with this idea. So they have no other object or purpose than that of carrying out what they have imagined, like one who should wish to give the same kind of clothes to all, whether they are big or little;" or, as the same author says elsewhere, "like those who have only one kind of salve for every wound" (*Spiritual Catechism*, vol. ii., part iii., chap. ii.).

needs, communicating to them certain attractions to which we must pay great heed, lest a purely human direction be substituted for that which is Divine. Who will not agree with those wise words which the Ven. Fr. Libermann wrote to a young priest? "Regard it as a fundamental principle of direction that the person directed must not be cramped or too closely hedged about. Too many rules must not be prescribed. No rigid system must be followed in the spiritual life, or some souls will suffer. I regard it as essential in direction that we should allow perfect freedom to the action of grace, while we distinguish false attractions from the true, and hinder souls from starting aside or exceeding the proper bounds with regard to these attractions" (*Letter dated January 10, 1844*).

229. For beginners who are scarcely conscious of these particular attractions the part played by the director is necessarily greater. At the beginning of a life of piety the direction requires to be more detailed, more minute; but as the soul advances the action of the Holy Spirit becomes more felt, and care must be taken not to oppose it.

Listen to St. Francis of Sales, writing to a Superior of the Visitation: "The Directory of the Novitiate proposes many exercises, it is true, and it is good and fitting that at the beginning the mind should be kept steady and occupied. But when in course of time souls have become somewhat habituated to this multitude of interior acts, and are becoming shaped, their rough edges rounded and their spiritual torpor dispelled, then all these exercises can be merged in one exercise of greater simplicity—either the love of complaisance, or the love of benevolence, or the love of confidence, or of the union and reunion of the heart to the will of God—so that this multiplicity transforms itself into unity."

"And, further, if even in the novitiate there is found some soul which fears to subject its mind to the prescribed exercises, always provided that this fear does not proceed from caprice, presumption, disdain, or chagrin, it is for the

prudent mistress to conduct it by another way, although ordinarily this one is useful, as experience shows" (*Letter dated February 22, 1820*).

230. It is more especially when they have arrived at the unitive life, as St. Francis of Sales points out, that souls soon feel a distaste for an over-minute and systematic direction. The contemplative soul is commonly drawn to the simple presence of God and a sweet and loving union with Him. Meditation upon some particular virtue would be a great burden to it. It willingly discards all that multiplicity of exterior practices which aided it before and to which it was so attached, just as we leave the ladder when we have reached the top¹ and it has served its purpose. The more it advances the more it simplifies itself; inclinations, thoughts, affections, and acts, all concentrate themselves more and more in the desire, the love, and the accomplishment of the Divine will alone.²

If, then, in the process of this spiritual training by probations the persons directed must not be allowed by caprice or laziness to break off the exercises suggested to them, regard must nevertheless be had to the usual dispositions of advanced souls, and these must be allowed more latitude, so as not to turn them away from the path marked out for them by God.

CHAPTER V

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

231. In the preceding chapter we have shown how necessary it is for the devout soul to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit faithfully. "All our perfection depends upon

¹ Cf. Libermann, *Letter of August 19, 1835*.

² Cf. Grou, *Manuel des âmes intérieures : de la simplicité*.

this fidelity, and we may say that the whole of our spiritual life consists in watching the ways and movements of the Spirit of God in our souls, and in strengthening our will in the determination to follow them, making use of all the exercises of prayer, reading, Sacraments, the practice of the Christian virtues and of good works, for this purpose" (Father Lallement, *Spiritual Doctrine*, 4 principe, chap. ii.).

So all the means of sanctification to which we referred have in reality no other end than the emancipation of the human heart from the thousand fetters which prevent it from hearing and responding to God's call. The devout soul, by dint of laudable exertion, has overcome the chief obstacles to its progress in the purgative life. It has begun to experience those sweet operations of grace, those consolations of devotion, which are, as it were, the forerunners of a closer, more intimate direction of the Holy Spirit. But there are still causes which may retard its advancement, and these usually are a more or less pronounced tendency to dissipation of mind, the love of comfort and of self. When these have been faithfully resisted by recollection, mortification, patience, and humility, the Divine action, finding fewer barriers, is able to operate with more freedom, and the inspirations, except during moments of trial and aridity, will become more numerous and more urgent.

232. It is evident that he who is faithful to these inspirations, who allows himself to be guided in all things by the Spirit of God, will have good cause to congratulate himself upon his wise conduct.¹ "O God, Theotimus, if

¹ An ancient author has said that three months of perfect fidelity to all the inspirations of the Holy Spirit will establish the soul in a state that will certainly lead it to perfection. And Father Pergmayer, S.J. (in his little work upon the *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, treating of purity of heart, p. 106), says: "Only make the experiment for three months of never refusing God anything, and you will see what a change will be brought about, and how the whole interior being will be altered."

we received the heavenly inspirations in the full extent of their power, how speedily should we make great progress in holiness!" (St. Francis of Sales, *The Love of God*, ii. 11).

"Our greatest evil lies in our opposition to God's designs and our resistance to His inspirations, for we either will not hear them; or, having heard them, we reject them; or, having received them, we defile them with a thousand imperfections of attachments, self-complacency, and self-satisfaction.

"And yet the principal point in the spiritual life so consists in disposing ourselves for grace and purity of heart that, if two persons consecrated themselves simultaneously to the service of God, and one gave himself up entirely to good works and the other to the purification of his heart and *the casting off of all that was opposed to grace within him*, *this latter would arrive at perfection twice as soon as the first*" (Lallemand, *loc. cit.*, § 6).

233. But can we always recognize the inspirations of God, and are we not sometimes liable to be mistaken? The angel of darkness may transform himself into an angel of light, and the creations of our imagination are not always distinguishable at first sight from the holy thoughts inspired by the Spirit of God. Spiritual writers have, therefore, regarded what they call the rules for the discernment of spirits as an important point in spiritual science. The spirits which influence the heart of man are the Divine Spirit, the human spirit, and the diabolic spirit. We will speak first of the diabolic spirit.

SECTION I.—MARKS OF THE DIABOLIC SPIRIT.

234. How, then, may we recognize the suggestions of the devil? "We must carefully examine," says St. Ignatius, "the succession and the trend of our thoughts. If the beginning, the middle, and the end—everything about them—is good, and tending purely to good, it is a

proof that they emanate from our good angel ; but if in the train of thoughts suggested to us we end by finding something bad or distracting, or not so good as we had intended, or if these thoughts enfeeble the soul, disturb and trouble it by taking away its former peace, tranquillity, and repose, it is a clear sign that they proceed from the wicked spirit, the enemy of our progress and of our eternal salvation" (*Discernment of Spirits*, second week, rule 5).

We may, then, recognize the action of the devil by any one of the following signs :

- (1) Either the *object* proposed is bad.
- (2) Or the *method* is faulty, the acts to which we feel an inclination being rash or indiscreet.
- (3) Or the *motive* presented to the mind is vicious. We are led to act, for example, for the satisfaction of pride or vanity, or some other failing.
- (4) Or the *principle* is evil, the sentiment from which the inclination proceeds is reprehensible ; we form such a determination under the influence of a feeling of bitterness, impatience, or cowardice.
- (5) Or, finally, the *results* are pernicious, the diabolical suggestions producing trouble and anxiety, and tending to discouragement and despair.

With regard to this last rule, let us note that a troubled mind and anxiety are a sign of the devil's operation, but this is only in souls which are in God's grace, for, as St. Ignatius rightly remarks, "As for those people who go from mortal sin to mortal sin, the usual conduct of the enemy is to suggest apparent pleasures to them, filling their imaginations with sensual enjoyment and delights, so as to keep his hold over them, and plunge them further into their vices and sins. The good Spirit, on the other hand, acts in an opposite manner. He excites trouble and remorse in their conscience, making them conscious of the reproaches of their reason" (*Discernment of Spirits*, first week, rule 1).

235. As soon as we recognize the voice of our enemy, we must meet him with disdain and contempt, casting aside his propositions without considering them for an instant. This is one of St. Francis of Sales' most frequent counsels. "Hold no parley with your enemy, neither answer him a single word, unless it be that which our Lord answered him, and with which He confounded him : 'Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve'" (*Devout Life*, iv. 7). "Eve, thinking to argue, was lost" (*Letter to St. Jane Frances*, October 14, 1604). "As for those little temptations which, like flies and gnats, come and pass before our eyes, and sometimes bite us on the cheek, sometimes on the nose—for it is impossible to be quite free from their importunity—our best manner of resistance is not to let ourselves be tormented by them, for they cannot harm us, although they may be annoying, provided that we are fully resolved in our wish to serve God" (*Devout Life*, iv. 9). "Our enemy is a loud barker, but do not disturb yourself at all, for I know that he cannot bite. Laugh at him, and let him do his worst. Do not fight with him. Give him the cold shoulder; it is all beneath your notice. He has clamoured and made a great hubbub round about the Saints, but for all that there they are at the place which he has lost, the wretch" (*Letter to St. Jane Frances*, probably in 1605).

This does not mean that we must not fight in times of temptation, or resort to prayer, resisting with all our might, either by thinking of something else or protesting our fidelity to God.¹ But we must carry on this contest without losing our confidence and coolness, or we shall lose the victory. "If you had not become anxious after the first skirmish," wrote St. Francis of Sales, again to a lady, "but had taken your courage in both hands, you would not have fallen at the second. Moreover, why get sad? Remember this, so long as the temptation is grievous to you,

¹ Cf. *Devout Life*, iv. 7.

there is nothing to fear. For why does it distress you, save because it is against your will?" (*Letter* of February 18, 1605).

And not only must we not permit ourselves to be troubled by the suggestions of the wicked angel, but an even greater perfection lies in not being too desirous of being freed from them. "With regard to your old temptations," her saintly director wrote to St. Jane Frances, "do not be so anxious for deliverance from them. I should be sorry to have you voluntarily desiring this unnecessary and perhaps hurtful peace" (*Letter* of July 24, 1607).

Finally, we must know how to extract good from evil, and this is what hits the devil hardest. "*Humble yourself greatly*, and do not be astonished. The lilies which grow amongst thorns are the fairest, and roses near water are the most fragrant, and become perfumed with musk. What can he know who is never tempted?" (*Letter to Mother Fabre*, December 15, 1615).

Thus, humility with regard to ourselves and protestations of absolute confidence in God, of immutable fidelity in His service, this is what temptation must work in us. If the devil by stirring up this mud of the passions which is at the bottom of our miserable humanity only succeeds in making us more humble, more distrustful of self, and more disposed to rely upon God, he will be caught in his own snares, and will only assist our progress whilst attempting to send us to perdition.

236. Such are the tactics that we must oppose to the devil. It is true that we do not always perceive his presence, but we must always be on the watch for him when we are in difficulties. In cases of doubt it is by distress of mind especially that the devil's work is recognizable. "God has joined happiness and holiness together, so that His graces not only sanctify the soul, but also console it and fill it with peace and sweetness. The suggestions of the devil have just the opposite effect—if not at first, at any rate, in the end. We may recognize the

serpent by his tail—that is to say, by the results of his operations and the goal to which he leads us."

All those hypothetical or conditional propositions which have no other purpose than that of distressing us, emanate from the devil. As, for instance : " Supposing that God should abandon me on such an occasion ?" Or, again : " If things should turn out in such or such a way, what should I do ?" We must not reply to these suggestions in any way, or dwell upon these kinds of thoughts, which are only suggested to us by our enemy for the purpose of destroying our confidence in God, and throwing us into anxiety and discouragement " (Father Lallemant, *Spiritual Doctrine*, 4 principe, chap. iv., art. iii.).

Discouragement, in fact, is the devil's usual mode of seducing souls. The majority of souls are lost through discouragement. We cannot, therefore, warn them too strongly against this danger, or repeat our caution too often. This is one of Satan's wiles. God never discouraged anyone. Not only is it the case that discouragement does not come from God, but it offends Him, since it is an act of distrust either of His power or of His infinite mercy.

237. We have pointed out some of the distinctive signs of diabolic suggestion, but the temptation may come from our nature, and not from the devil. How, then, may it be distinguished ? We can recognize the work of nature because the effects produced can easily be traced to their source. Thus the drunkard will be tempted by nature when thirst parches his palate, or when wine, the object of his passion, is offered to him. So in temptations against purity : if the motions of concupiscence begin in the flesh, the temptation would seem to be from nature.

But when it has no natural cause, when it begins in the imagination (for the tempter acts upon our souls especially by exciting the imagination), when it comes and then suddenly ceases without there being any outward circumstance to explain either its sudden onslaught or its unex-

pected abatement, then, on the contrary, we must assume that the devil is the chief author of the temptation.

It is true that the devil may intervene even when the temptation comes from our nature, but his intervention is then recognizable by the fact that the effect produced far exceeds the scope of the natural cause whence it proceeds—the passion, for instance, being violently excited, or the imagination strongly moved, as a result of some circumstance of very small importance.

We believe that a very strong temptation is scarcely ever experienced which has not been stirred up by the devil, since this roaring lion prowls round about us, watching for a favourable occasion to devour us. Moreover (and this is why we do not insist further on this point), if the temptation is due to nature alone, the proper method of dealing with it would be as we have described—to resist vigorously, but calmly, and without anxiety.¹

238. A no less dangerous class of temptation is that which presents itself under the guise of something good. We see souls forming grand projects, wishing to make vows or to accomplish extraordinary acts, to which they say they are led by the Spirit of God. They give themselves up to frightful austerities, and yet in all this they are but the sport of the devil, or at least of an over-excited imagination. In doubtful cases the signs of delusion are those which we have pointed out at the beginning of this chapter : imprudence, indiscretion, or absurdity in the actions, or obstinacy and pride in the subjects. Humility and obedience are the touchstones by which we can distinguish the Divine inspirations from these false counterfeits.

We shall not return to this point again. In speaking of obedience to the voice of God, an attraction for

¹ "It matters little," says St. Bernard (*in Cantic. Serm.*, xxxii. 6) "whether we know whence the evil comes, provided we know that it is there. The essential thing is to watch and pray, that we may not give way to it, from whatever side it may come."

mortification, etc., we must always be understood to be referring to real and properly tested inspirations and attractions.

SECTION II.—MARKS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT, PURELY NATURAL INCLINATIONS AND CONCEPTIONS.

239. Apart from the devil's suggestions and the obviously evil inclinations of nature, human activity may produce other movements and tendencies in the soul which it is important for us to discern, in order that we may not confound them with the Divine inspirations.

We will class under one head, as proceeding either wholly or in part from nature, first, purely rational inclinations ; second, good but hasty movements ; and, finally, feelings of melancholy and sadness, and scruples which are doubtless encouraged by the enemy, but which usually spring from the natural disposition—namely, a tendency to gloomy ideas or weakness of judgment.

§ I. *Impulses which are Good, but Purely Rational.*

240. When the soul gives itself up to a good impulse by some consideration which is purely natural, the action is good, but it does not merit eternal life ; or at least, if we admit with St. Thomas (*vide supra*, No. 43) that in a just man there is always a virtual intention of referring everything to God, the merit of this action is less than it might have been. It is a serious loss for the Christian soul. A director must make it plain that simply natural virtues, or virtues in which faith has such a slight part, are insufficient, almost valueless, for heaven. He must advise his penitent to act with more exalted intentions and from Christian motives.

It is so reasonable, so right, and so beautiful to act for God in all things, always to seek to do His will. We can-

not, therefore, try too hard to inculcate in souls this maxim of St. Paul : " Do all for the glory of God " (*Omnia in gloriam Dei facite*).

§ 2. *Eagerness.*

241. Actions in which nature works alone and independently of grace are particularly common in imperfect souls.¹ In devout and fervent Christians these purely natural acts are rarer, but nature and grace are often mingled in their actions, and this detracts from their merits, and may even become a danger. To employ St. Paul's language, in the edifice of the Christian life the gold is intermixed with straw and hay, vile substances which must be purified by fire.

It is in the practice of good and the pursuit of virtue that we encounter this human activity (which we call *eagerness*) together with the movements inspired by grace. While grace enlightens the soul with regard to the urgent reasons in favour of perfection, nature also finds a say ; it enjoys in advance both the esteem that it will inspire and the good opinion that it will have of itself.

It busies itself and makes haste, and in its indiscreet activity wishes to go further and more quickly than the action of grace.

Whilst grace inspires a horror of sin and a wholesome fear of offending God, nature falls into an excessive and unreasonable anxiety. Grace causes vigilance, but it does not in the least destroy the holy liberty of God's children ; nature engenders constraint and interior compulsions. Grace, after a fault committed, excites repentance, and gives birth in the heart to a sincere, profound, but trustful and peaceful sorrow. Nature, on the other hand, conceives an impatient chagrin full of bitterness, which troubles and depresses it.

¹ We speak here of deliberate actions, for we have not to trouble about instinctive and indeliberate acts.

We must make no mistake, therefore. These anxieties, this eagerness in the search after virtue, come not from God, but from ourselves and our self-love. And it is just the same with that uneasiness and vexation which we feel after our faults : self-esteem is the cause of them. "How is it that, if any imperfection or sin befalls us, we are astonished, troubled, or impatient ? Doubtless it is because we think ourselves good, resolute, and strong ; and so, when we see that we are nothing of the sort, and that we have failed, and have been mistaken, we are consequently troubled, offended, and uneasy ; while if we realized what we really are, instead of wondering at our falls we should marvel that we ever stand upright¹ (St. Francis of Sales, *Letter to the Abbess of Puits d'Orbe*, April, 1604).

242. It is easy to understand that all these vexations and anxieties, all this eagerness, do not bring about the desired result, but, on the contrary, they prevent it. Anxiety proceeds from our unruly desire to be delivered from the present evil or to secure the good that we aspire to. Nevertheless, there is nothing which so aggravates evil and impedes the good as anxiety and eagerness. Birds fail to escape from the nets and traps in which they are taken because, finding themselves caught, they fight and struggle wildly to get away, and so entangle themselves the more. When, therefore, you are pursued by a desire

¹ "When humility is true, doubtless the soul recognizes its lowness ; it groans at seeing itself so wretched, it is well persuaded of its own wickedness, and understands that these feelings it has of itself are only the simple truth. But this sight causes it neither trouble nor anxiety, neither darkness nor dryness ; quite on the contrary, it produces peace, joy, sweetness, and light to the soul. Even the pain it feels consoles it, because it understands that it is well for it to feel this pain ; it sees that this pain is a great grace of God. If it groans at having offended God, on the other hand, the thought of Divine mercy dilates its heart. The light which enlightens it covers it with confusion—true, but it also makes it praise the Lord for having borne with it so long" (St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. xxx.).

to be delivered from some evil or to attain to some good, before all things keep your mind calm and tranquil ; compose your judgment and your will, and then pursue your aim quietly and gently, adopting in an orderly way the means which are most suitable. And when I say *quietly*, I do not mean negligently, but without haste, disturbance, and uneasiness ; otherwise, instead of attaining your end, you will spoil everything, and will embarrass yourself still more" (*Devout Life*, iv. 2).

243. The way to arrive at this tranquillity, this sweet and peaceful self-possession, is to forget self and rely much more upon God than on ourselves. And when the eye of the soul turns inwardly, despite itself, it is for the purpose of accepting its abjection, and because it does not wish to outstrip the action of grace. " You must not be searching into your heart to see if it is pleasing to Him, but, rather, whether His heart is dear to you. And if you look at His heart, it will be impossible but that it shall satisfy you, for it is so gentle, so sweet, so condescending, so loving towards its pitiful creatures, provided that they acknowledge their wretchedness, so gracious towards the unhappy, so good towards the penitent. And who would not love that royal heart so paternally maternal towards us ?" (St. Francis of Sales, *Letter*, February 18, 1618).

" *You think much too much about yourself,*" the Venerable Libermann wrote to a seminarist. " *It is one of the things which hinder you greatly in overcoming your failings.* Why do you always worry and distress yourself because you find it hard to conquer your defects ? It is pure pride. God does not absolutely *require* that you should conquer them, but He wills you to have the desire to do so, and that you should strive thereto in order to be pleasing in His eyes. Labour, then, to this end, gently and quietly, and be at peace, putting all your confidence in Him alone ; bear all the failings which it shall please God to allow for the time being patiently and with tranquillity. If you

distress yourself and grow impatient, it comes from your wishing to be delivered for other and bad reasons—for example, in order to be more estimable and more esteemed, etc. But so long as you get impatient in this way you will not conquer them" (*Letter*, September 5, 1837).

244. The masters of the spiritual life are unanimous in advising us to despise these little anxieties ; all assert that it would be harmful to heed them. "Strive, my daughters," said St. Teresa, "to understand clearly that God does not consider trifles, as you believe, and do not allow your soul and your spirit to be hampered by anxieties which might cause you to lose great benefits. Having a right intention, a will fully determined not to offend God, open your heart wide ; otherwise, instead of acquiring holiness, you will fall into many imperfections into which the devil will push you, and you will not do, either for yourself or others, as much good as you might have done" (*Way of Perfection*, chap. xli.).

St. Francis of Sales advised St. Jane Frances to read this passage in the works of "the Blessed Mother Teresa": "It will help you," he said, "to understand clearly what I have often told you, that we must not be too punctilious in the exercise of virtue : we must attack them freely, frankly, and simply, in the old French fashion, with liberty of spirit, in good faith, *grosso modo* ; what I am afraid of is the spirit of constraint and melancholy" (*Letter*, written, probably, in 1605).

Indeed, the Saint in his letters often returns to this subject, and his insistence proves how much importance he attached to it. "My third commandment is that you do as little children do. So long as they feel their mother holding them by the sleeve, they go forward boldly, and run about, and are not afraid when they are unsteady owing to the weakness of their legs. So, while you perceive that God holds you by the good-will and resolution to serve Him which He has given you, advance boldly, and do not be amazed at the little shocks and stumbles

that occur ; and you must not be vexed because of them, provided that at intervals you throw yourself into His arms and kiss Him with the kiss of charity. Go forward joyfully and with open heart as far as you can, and if you do not always go joyfully, at least let it be with courage and faith " (*Letter to a Novice*, January 16, 1613).

He especially objected to see anyone give way after a fall to those fits of discouragement which lead to breaking off and abandoning everything. " We must not snap the strings or cast away the lute when we perceive a discord, but rather listen attentively in order to discover whence the false note proceeds, and quietly tighten or slacken the string, according as the art requires (*To a Superior of the Visitation*, edit. Briday, vol. vi., p. 110).

" Believe me, Philothea," he says in the *Devout Life*, (Book III., chap. ix.), " as the remonstrances of a father, made gently and kindly, have much more effect on a child with a view to his correction than when he displays anger and temper, so when the heart has committed some fault, if we correct it with sweet and gentle remonstrance, with compassion rather than anger, encouraging it to amendment, its repentance will go much further and penetrate deeper than if it repents irritably and tempestuously. For my own part, if, for example, I greatly desired not to fall into the sin of vanity, and, nevertheless, fell grievously into it, I should not thus call my heart to task : ' Art thou not vile and abominable, that, after so many resolutions, thou hast allowed thyself to be carried away by vanity ? Die, then, of shame ! No longer dare to raise thine eyes to heaven, blind, insolent traitor that thou art and disloyal to thy God,' and so on. But I should correct it by reasoning and compassion, thus : ' See, now, my poor heart, here art thou fallen into that pit from which we have so often firmly resolved to escape. Come, let us rise up again, and turn our backs on it for ever. Let us entreat God's mercy once more, and trust in it, that it will henceforth assist us to be more resolute, and so let us return to

the path of humility. Courage ! let us be more on our guard. God will aid us, and we shall yet make headway.' And by this reproof I should build up a firm and solid resolution never again to fall into that fault, taking suitable means to this end, the advice of my director especially."

245. All these counsels point to the same end—never to yield to an impulse of nature, and in all things to follow those of grace alone. There are some ardent hearts who especially need firm and constant direction on this point ; we note eagerness in every detail of their piety.

So in the practice of recollection they often do violence to themselves in order to combine the sensible presence of our Lord with their occupations. They weary themselves, and suffer an anguish of heart and tension of spirit, instead of practising a gentle and peaceful recollection. In the same way, when they experience dryness in their prayers, they make astounding efforts to extract effective acts from their hearts, instead of simply abiding before God in a disposition of interior love and profound abasement. There are others who, in their examination of conscience search into their conduct with exaggerated care, in the fear lest something escape them. "With regard to your examinations," the Venerable Father Libermann wrote to a seminarist, "the best plan, I think, is to place yourself quietly before God, letting everything come from Him alone. When you feel that your heart is quite at peace, and in union with God, begin gently to direct upon yourself the interior gaze of your soul, so that you may see in what you have sinned. I tell you to do this gently, for you must not put too much energy and eagerness into the search for your faults" (*Letter*, August 19, 1835).

But a still more frequent failing, which may become exceedingly harmful to spiritual progress, is the natural ardour, the eager activity, that we bring to the accomplishment of the duties of our state. As our object

is praiseworthy, we are not on our guard against this failing, and we expose ourselves to the danger of rejecting the guidance of the Spirit of God, and acting henceforth in a purely human manner ; while by giving way to our predilection for certain employments we end by neglecting other duties just as urgent, but less agreeable.

246. An important point should be noted here. In the first stage of a devout life, when the soul, which has just embarked resolutely upon the service of God, feels all the ardours of its new-born piety, these generous and powerful flights come in the ordinary course. They should be directed rather than repressed ; the beauty, the sublimity, of the virtue to which it feels so ardently attracted must be extolled, and a deep and strong desire to obtain it must be inspired in the soul.

But violent things are not lasting. When the soul is completely won over and firmly resolved, it will require to be set free from all its precipitation, agitation, uneasy and eager activity. "Your great mortification," wrote the Venerable Libermann to the director of a seminary in (1839, *Letter 187*), "must consist in taming and moderating your over-activity and vivacity of mind and heart ; in aiming to do all for God, but gently, suavely, and peacefully ; never giving in to the violent emotion which carries you away, even in the impulses of devotion, which must be tamed down, quieted and moderated, when they show signs of violence and impetuosity of spirit. You must never follow an interior movement which does not leave your soul at rest in God's presence, which does not draw you and unite you solely and peacefully to God. . . . God attracts us powerfully, but always in perfect peace."

If the person directed carries this excessive impetuosity even into his vocal and mental prayers, he must be urged to show a greater tranquillity and repose. "We must try to check the violence of these outbursts," says St. Teresa, "and bring the soul back, little by little, into a state of quietness, just as people check the tears of children by

giving them something to drink. Reason must hold the reins, so that these hasty impulses may be moderated, lest any imperfection be mingled therein and they should be largely the work of the senses and of nature. Thus the soul must be soothed like a little child with a loving caress, and brought to love God quietly, and not with impetuous violence. This soul should set about confining all its affection inwardly, without allowing it to diffuse itself, like a vessel which boils up and overflows on every side because fuel has been indiscreetly heaped upon the fire" (*Life*, xxix.).

247. From this restless activity of nature another evil, again, often springs. This is the desire to be elsewhere than where God has willed, seeking perfection outside the ways in which God has set us. "It is," says St. Francis of Sales, "the evil of evils amongst souls of good-will that they always wish to be what they cannot be, and that which they can be they do not desire to be" (*Letter to a Nun*, April 3, 1606).

248. Such, then, is over-eagerness, a very common failing with ardent souls. "I have suffered from this malady," St. Francis of Sales once wrote to St. Jane Frances (*Letter*, November 21, 1604). And we see that at the outset of his direction the Saint regarded it as one of his principal duties to forewarn the generous souls amongst his penitents against this natural and imperfect activity. In fact, the less nature is allowed to act, the more powerful will be the operations of grace.

§ 3. *Scruples.*

249. There is a fear of offending God inspired by grace, but in fearful souls, or those of defective judgment, this is often accompanied by an unreasonable fear, which espies evil where none exists, and produces the most distressing anguish. This tendency to scrupulosity is a deplorable one, and may be exceedingly injurious. Scruples turn us

aside from vocal prayer, give a distaste for mental prayer, estrange us from the Sacraments, weaken our faith in God, destroy all strength and energy, and finally, by means of the clouds and the anxieties that they produce, and especially by the discouragement they provoke, they not only prevent all progress, but they engender many faults and lead insensibly to the destruction of piety.¹

The scrupulous do not take enough heed of the dangers which thus threaten them ; they must be enlightened, so that, becoming desirous of obtaining a great freedom of heart, they may ask it of God by their fervent prayers, and make sincere attempts to rid themselves of this unfortunate inclination.

250. After prayer, the best, or rather, the only, remedy—we quote St. Alphonsus—is obedience. “ Above all,” continues the holy Doctor (*Praxis Confessarii*, No. 95), “ let the director thoroughly persuade his scrupulous penitents of these two truths, that they have nothing to fear by obeying, and that they have everything to fear by not doing so. He will frequently remind them of the words of Jesus Christ : *Qui vos audit, me audit* (He that heareth you, heareth Me). He will point out to them again how they insult God by distrusting His word, doubting His goodness, and disobeying His recommendations. He will cite to them the authority of all the Doctors and Saints.” St. Alphonsus quotes on this subject St. Bernard, St. Antony, St. Francis of Sales, St. Philip Neri, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius, etc. All state that an obedient soul has never perished, and that disobedience in this matter may cause the greatest evils, hindering all progress, ruining devotion, and leading to despair. He will be very gentle when they have been obedient, very severe when they have been insubordinate (*id., Theolog. Mor.*, li. 16). And the obedience to be exacted is a blind obedience. “ No arguing,” he will tell

¹ This is what happened, notably, to Luther. In his religious youth he was a prey to many scruples.

them. "Your imagination is insane ; one does not argue with madmen. Besides, the devil employs all his arts to bewilder your poor spirit ; he overwhelms you by the more or less specious arguments which he puts before you. He perplexes you just as he pleases, and then he laughs at you when he sees that you have listened to him and believed him."

Thus, the scrupulous person must not parley with his imagination, or try to solve the difficulties which crowd before his mind, or weigh objections to decisions that have been come to. He must be satisfied with repeatedly making short, resolute acts of faith concerning the truths which have been expounded to him by his confessor. God is a Father of infinite goodness. He does not punish involuntary thoughts ; on the contrary, He rewards those to whom these doubts are displeasing. He has instituted confession for the peace of souls, and not for their torture. His Church expressly teaches that a simple confession, made in good faith, suffices to wash out the gravest sins, even although the penitent has forgotten to accuse himself of them.

Relying upon these truths, the confessor must forbid any going back on the past without express permission on his part. It is better, St. Alphonsus teaches, that the confession should be wanting in integrity than that the penitent should be entangled in scruples. He will command him to banish remorselessly, as we banish impure thoughts, all the anxieties, disquietudes, and discouragements which attack the spirit ; never to heed them in practice, never, for instance, to deprive himself of Communion unless he can swear, before God, that he is guilty of mortal sin.

He will forbid all reflection that is calculated to lead to distress of mind, even those thoughts of hell and God's judgments which in themselves are excellent, but which are injurious for the scrupulous. These persons should meditate only upon the goodness of God, His infinite mercy ;

the incomprehensible love of the Heart of Jesus, His burning desire to save souls; the power of Mary, the tenderness of this dear Mother for sinners, etc.

Finally, he will advise him to be cheerful, affable, and pleasant to everybody, and not to allow any of his melancholy to appear. "Beware of over-eagerness, melancholy, and scruples. You would not offend God for anything in the world; that is quite enough in order to live happily" (*Letter of St. Francis of Sales to St. Jane Frances, June 24, 1604*).

251. The director will render the greatest service to his scrupulous penitents by obliging them, despite their foolish anxiety, to communicate without receiving absolution. They are, indeed, obeying a selfish feeling, and not a desire to please God, when they urgently seek for absolution. They hope by this means to see their troubles ended, and in their cowardice they prefer thus to terminate their distress rather than make an act of obedience at all costs. When, on the other hand, in submission to their director's decisions, they trample their distress underfoot, they practise excellently, although without delight and consolation, their faith, their confidence in God, and their love. Faith tells them that God speaks to them by the mouth of their director, therefore they make an act of faith in obeying. They make an act of confidence by relying upon the Divine mercy and goodness. Finally and especially, they make an act of love. "I will obey," they say, "whatever it may cost me, since my obedience is pleasing to the Heart of my God. I shall doubtless suffer, I shall endure real tortures, but God will be pleased, and that is sufficient for me." By these hard-won victories they obtain very precious graces; little by little they master the imagination, and in the long run they acquire peace for the soul. God, who excels in bringing good out of evil, will make this severe trial conduce to their greater advantage; the peace which they have acquired will be deep and lasting, and they will serve God with a profounder and more perfect confidence.

SECTION III.—MARKS OF DIVINE INSPIRATION.

§ 1. *Divine Inspiration in General.*

252. “The operations proper to God and to His angels in their action on a soul is to banish the trouble and sadness which the enemy strives to introduce, and to instil true happiness and real spiritual joy. On the other hand, the office of the enemy is to combat that joy and interior consolation by seeming reasons, subtleties, and continual illusions.

“The good angel is wont gently, lightly and sweetly to touch the souls of those who progress daily in virtue; his action is, so to speak, like a drop of water softly penetrating into a sponge. The wicked angel, on the other hand, comes violently, with noise and disturbance, like water dashing against a stone” (*St. Ignatius, Spiritual Exercises*, “Discernment of Spirits”).

If the inspiration to do or to abstain from doing has not been preceded by any consideration or reflection, if it has presented itself to the mind suddenly, when we were not thinking of it, if it was not in any way suggested, we may presume that it comes from God.¹ Nature does not proceed so abruptly. In that phenomenon, so habitual to the human understanding, which modern psychologists call association of ideas, there is always a connection between the two successive ideas. They have always

¹ This is only a presumption, and not a sufficient guide to constitute an absolute rule of conduct. St. Teresa, speaking of interior voices (*Sixth Mansion*, chap. iii.), says that we may recognize by various signs that they do not emanate from the imagination, and by this amongst others. Often the soul is not thinking about the thing which is spoken, and the inspiration comes, as it were, at the wrong time—it may be when we are engaged in conversation. Or, again, this interior voice corresponds to thoughts which are merely passing through the mind, or which have passed through it before, and often to things which we have never thought about at all. They cannot, then, be the work of the imagination.

some bearing on each other, and the most apparently incoherent reverie is by no means without some natural sequence. With regard to the devil, he can only act directly upon the senses, either internal or external. In order to affect the will he either proposes some object to the imagination or he stirs up the passions.¹ He may, it is true, act suddenly, but, as we have said, the tempter is easily recognized by the trouble and uneasiness that he causes.

The Divine operation, therefore, and the Divine operation alone, affects the will directly. When God operates in this way upon the will, and human action does not come and interfere with the Divine action, the impulse felt is a gentle one, tending to God rather than to the object concerned, and the spirit remains at peace, or, at least, its action is calm and temperate. When, on the other hand, the motion comes from nature or the devil, the other faculties are directly affected. The imagination is enkindled, the intelligence becomes active, ideas follow one another in quick succession, arguments are abundant, and the will, thus excited, pursues the object of its desire inflexibly and often obstinately.

253. Such are the principal rules given by ascetic writers for the discernment of the Divine inspirations. It is frequently necessary for pious souls to question themselves in this way : "Such a thought has occurred to me. Must I look upon it as an inspiration of grace, and order my conduct in conformity to it ?" Before we can answer this question satisfactorily, the following points must be considered :

- (1) Is the work to which we feel drawn good in itself ?
- (2) Is it prudent and wise ? That is, is it not an obstacle to some greater good, and will it entail no regrettable consequences ?
- (3) Is the intention—that is, the good aimed at—holy ? Are the motives supernatural which urge on our action ?

¹ St. Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises*, second and eighth rule, second week.

For it is the motive which specifies the act, the intention which makes the value of the work.

(4) Does the work breathe of abnegation and charity ? That which is of nature always shows a certain self-seeking. The surest sign of abnegation is perfect indifference, and the disposition to accomplish the Divine will, always and in all things, only staying to recognize it in order to come to a decision.

(5) Again, is the inspiration accompanied by peace and confidence in God ? "One of the surest signs of the goodness of inspirations, and particularly of such as are extraordinary, is the peace and tranquillity of the heart which receives them ; for the Divine Spirit is vehement indeed, but of a vehemence that is gentle, sweet, and peaceful" (*Love of God*, viii. 12).

(6) If important matters are concerned, is the attraction lasting and constant ? The inclinations, desires, and projects which are the fruit of the imagination share in the essentially mobile and changeable character of that faculty ; they pass or are modified very quickly. It is the same with the suggestions of the devil, for they come to us, as we have said, by the intermediary of the imagination.

254. St. Jane Frances de Chantal had placed herself under the direction of St. Francis of Sales, and being anxious to know whether in this matter she had obeyed the promptings of grace, or had allowed herself to be led by a purely human instinct, she told her doubts to the holy Bishop. This is the reply, full of wisdom, which she received : "Your choice bears all the marks of a good and lawful one. I pray you, therefore, have no more doubts about that. The great spiritual movement which has led you to it, almost by force, and with great consolation ; the consideration which I brought to bear upon it before consenting ; the fact that neither you nor I have trusted to ourselves in this matter, but to the judgment of your good and learned and prudent confessor ; that we have given time for the first agitations of your conscience to abate

had they been ill-founded ; that the prayers, not of one day, nor two, but of several months, preceded the step—these are undoubtedly infallible signs that it was the will of God. The impulses of the wicked spirit or of the human spirit are of quite another kind. They are terrible and vehement, but have no constancy. Their first whisper into the ear of the soul that they are troubling is to listen to no advice, or, at least, let it be the advice of some one of little or no experience. They hurry us, they wish us to *complete the contract before going into the details*, to content ourselves with some brief prayer which only serves as a pretext for deciding the most important matters" (*Letter*, October 14, 1604).

255. This, then, is how we should proceed in affairs of moment : As far as possible avoid deciding in a hurry, take time for prayer, consult with prudent and virtuous people, and allow first impressions time to cool. These, if natural, will usually soon fade away.

Then, in order that we may be more certain of following the Divine will, let us discard all natural considerations, place ourselves in a state of complete indifference, that we may be able to say with all sincerity, like St. Paul : *Domine, quid me vis facere* (Lord, I have only one desire—to do Thy will). In this way we shall come to act purely for God, to obey solely the impulses of the Holy Spirit, and our works will be entirely meritorious, and this even in cases where nature and grace tend to the same end and inspire the same designs.

256. Upon this point let us hear St. Francis of Sales again : "When human prudence is intermingled in our designs, it is difficult to silence, for it is marvellously importunate, and pushes itself forward eagerly and boldly in our affairs, despite ourselves."

What must we do, then, so that our intention may be purified ? Let us examine whether our design is legitimate, right, and pious. If so, let us propose and plan to do it, no longer in obedience to human prudence, but that

the will of God may be accomplished therein. "If we have a daughter, for example, whom we are moved to place in religion by motives of human prudence, touching the state of our affairs, we will say to ourselves : 'Not before men, but before God, I say : "O Lord, I wish to offer Thee this child, because such as she is she is Thine. Although my human prudence incites me to this course, yet, Lord, did I but know that it was not also Thy good pleasure, despite my interior prudence, I would in no wise follow it, rejecting the said prudence which my heart feels, but does not desire to consent to, and embracing Thy will, which my heart perceives not with the senses, but to which it consents with its resolution.'" And when that is done, let the human prudence clamour as it will, for the work will not be its offspring, and you can say to it, as the Samaritans said to the woman of Samaria when they had heard our Lord : 'We now believe, not for thy saying, for we ourselves have heard Him.'

"Human prudence will no longer be responsible. Although it may have excited the will to action, yet you made the resolution only because you knew that it would be pleasing to God. Thus, by the infusion of the Divine will the human will is corrected" (*Letter to a Lady*, ed. Briday, vol. i., p. 389).

257. In matters of less moment it would be a mistake to wish for long deliberations. "For unimportant, everyday actions, in which a mistake is neither of great consequence nor irreparable, what necessity is there to be harassed, preoccupied, and busily engaged in making important consultations ? Why should I disturb myself as to whether God prefers me to say the Rosary or the Office of Our Lady, since there is not enough difference between them to justify a great inquiry into the matter ; whether I shall go to the hospital to visit the sick rather than to Vespers ; whether to go to hear a sermon or to a church where there is an indulgence ? As a rule, there is nothing so apparently remarkable in one more than in the

other that we need deliberate greatly about it. We must do everything in good faith and simply. As St. Basil used to say : ‘ Do what seems right freely, so as not to waste time and run the risk of anxiety, scruples, and superstition ’ ” (*Treatise on the Love of God*, viii. 14).

258. Some of the most frequent causes of preoccupations and anxieties to pious souls are the sacrifices which come in their way. They are often uncertain whether they ought to perform them. On the one hand, they are inclined to practise renunciation whenever it is possible ; on the other, they ask themselves if it is wise to go against their ideas and wishes on all occasions.

For the solution of these doubts we must refer to the rules of St. Ignatius quoted above, and to determine whether the remorse which the soul experiences after following the leadings of nature is from God or the enemy we must first examine into its habitual disposition. If it is full of faith, but still over-sensual and unmortified, the Spirit of God is certainly reproaching it for its self-love and excessive attachment to its own will, by means of these interior inspirations. We shall then be responding to the Holy Spirit if we encourage it to mortification and sacrifice. But if souls of complete good-will are in question, those who work courageously to purify themselves from their sins, the inspirations of grace are much more sweet and pleasant. “ It is then, so to speak, as a drop of water penetrating a sponge ” (*supra*, No. 252), entering into it without any shocks and, as it were, insensibly. If they feel troubled and uneasy, these troubles, these distresses, do not proceed from God : they come either from nature or Satan. We must, then, distrust them, and not allow ourselves to be drawn beyond the bounds of Christian prudence in the way of self-sacrifice. Not that we must cease to regret our weaknesses, and give up the holy virtue of mortification, but we must practise it in accordance with the words of St. Francis of Sales, “ freely and frankly,” humbling ourselves when we

fail, and always promising to be more faithful in the future.

259. This is the advice given to Madame de la Maisonfort by her two illustrious directors : " Whilst advising me to undertake these little sacrifices, he "—she is speaking of Fénelon—" has prescribed their limits, such as to do nothing contrary to edification, and more especially to charity and secrecy, not even to follow up instincts which might lead me to too serious things, and cause me to be considered fanatical ; that God is too considerate of my weakness to exact such things from me ; and that, finally, obedience would protect me from everything beyond certain simple actions which can never be obtrusive, or unfit me for the work of my vocation. He told me, further, that when I do not clearly discern whether it is a simple thought of the mind or a movement of grace which leads me to these little sacrifices, in any case of doubt to decide in my own favour, and to conclude that everything which comes to me accompanied by anxiety and after-reflection comes from my scrupulosity, and not from the Spirit of God at all."

Bossuet, to whom these lines were addressed, entirely approved this doctrine. In another letter to her he wrote : " Generally speaking, it is good to do these little things, because we thereby obtain grace to do greater. But from the moment that anxiety comes with them it is better to leave them alone ; peace is preferable to these little sacrifices, which may be either made or left unmade."

260. In short, if the really fervent soul, habituated to mortification, occasionally hangs, as it were, in the balance, asking itself if it would do wisely to impose upon itself some sacrifice, let it not seek to be inexorable concerning itself ; this would be to act by natural activity, and not by the motions of grace. It should, rather, be in a state of indifference, protesting that it wills nothing contrary to the Divine will, asking God lovingly to come to the help of its weakness, and so await in peace until circumstances

indicate the proper time, the proper course of action to pursue ; and all this without anxiety and haste, but freely and cheerfully. This method of action is more humble, and certainly more conformable to that which God requires.

There are, in fact, holy desires tending only to the glory of God, having all the marks of the Divine inspiration, which God, nevertheless, does not wish to see accomplished. “ He wishes us, then, for our own sanctification, to profit by the desire alone which He has instilled into us ; and this is sometimes productive of more good in our souls than if we had realized the desire with the aid of Divine grace ” (*Letter of Venerable Father Libermann*, January 24, 1842). So it is with certain desires of mortification, of zeal, of devotion—desires emanating from a sincere and generous heart, but to which circumstances are opposed, or the execution of which is prevented by the action of Providence. “ What we have to do in such a case is to content ourselves with our aspirations before God, without absolutely wishing to arrive at their execution, waiting for our Lord to make us act. . . . These desires (when they come indeed from grace) produce a great humiliation, a great self-abasement before God, with very great fervour of mind and heart, and in those souls in which God acts by love they bring about that languor of love which is the source of great perfection.”

If, instead of remaining thus entirely submissive to the action of grace, some eagerness is intermingled, if we should give way to the restless impulsion of nature, the results would be entirely different. “ A very common misfortune is that souls, feeling this impression of the desire which Divine grace excites in them, act afterwards on their own account, spur themselves forward, and violently encourage themselves in order to carry them out. They go much further than our Lord urges them, and, what is worse, even when the Master no longer urges them at all, they still wish to go forward. The results of this conduct

are not good—at least, not ordinarily so. Sometimes it incites to self-love, spiritual ambition, presumption, etc. ; sometimes it leads to discouragement, sometimes it produces strife, anxiety, uneasiness, even scrupulosity. In every case it results in the soul entering upon a false path, where it is exposed to illusions, and falls under the dominion of the imagination and its own action, serious inconveniences which separate it from God ” (*Letter of Venerable Father Libermann, January 24, 1842*).

§ 2. *Vocation.*

261. We have mentioned the marks of Divine inspirations. The most important of these inspirations are those which God sends to us to show us the kind of life that we are to embrace. These graces and these lights together constitute a *vocation*.

It seems unnecessary to linger upon the vocation to the secular state ; the absence of aspirations, or aptitude for a higher state, would suffice to indicate it as a state desired by God, since it is the ordinary path, and we should therefore continue in it, if we do not feel ourselves urged on by grace to a more perfect mode of life.

With regard to a call to one state rather than to another, whilst remaining in the world, Providence determines this, either in the ordinary course of events or by the natural inclination.

God, in fact, inclines souls, by the attractions which He sends them and the aptitudes which He gives them, to the accomplishment of the designs of His Providence. Only let us remark that, in order to determine God’s views, attractions which only last a little time, or repugnances which are weak and momentary, prove nothing at all, whilst attractions or repugnances which are persistent are a proof of His will.

262. Let us hear two pronouncements of St. Francis of Sales regarding the married state : “ Since your spirit

is by no means indifferent, but entirely inclined to the choice of marriage, and that you still feel yourself drawn thereto, although you have taken counsel with God, it is not expedient for any kind of consideration to do violence to so strong an impression : for all the other circumstances have no weight in the face of that strong inclination and propensity which you have—which, indeed, if it were weak and feeble, would need little attention, but being powerful and firm, it must serve as a foundation for the resolution.” The Saint wished, therefore, that on this point, as on others, we should begin by imploring God’s assistance ; then, we should regard the interior attraction as a sign of the Divine will ; if the attraction is lacking, he earnestly advised that this step should not be taken, especially did he recommend that this state should not be embraced against our will. “ Alas !” he wrote, “ those souls who have a particular inclination for marriage, however happy a one it may be, find in it so many occasions of patience and mortification that they can scarcely bear the burden of it ; and how would it be with you, entering into it entirely against the grain ? In other conditions I have known alleviations, but in this, never ” (*Letter*, March 31, 1620). *Tribulationem carnis habebunt hujusmodi.* St. Paul, speaking of married persons, said that they would have many trials in common. After that, what shall we say of Christians who enter the marriage state without any reflection, in obedience to some fancy or fascination, and not in order to accomplish the will of God ?

263. A vocation to a higher state must be carefully examined.¹ We will first give the marks of non-vocation, and then the positive signs of the Divine call.

¹ We cannot judge as to our vocation ; in this, more than any other matter, obedience is necessary. Even if it should happen that superiors or a director should be mistaken in deciding as to the vocation, God would not refuse His graces to one who has humbly obeyed, whilst he who should be his own adviser in so serious a matter would expose himself to great danger.

The marks of non-vocation are the existence of pressing and undoubted duties, incompatible with the mode of life which we might think of embracing, and the want of aptitude.

"If thy father or thy mother have a real need of thy assistance in order to live, then it is not time to practise the counsel of withdrawal into a monastery" (St. Francis of Sales, *Treatise of the Love of God*, viii. 6).

Thus it is, again, that the Canon Law forbids the admission to the religious profession of those who have debts, and who would thereby be rendered incapable of paying them. We say "pressing and undoubted duties." We must not be stopped by purely human considerations, and obstinately refuse to approve a vocation, under pretext that the soul professing to be called would do much more good in a state other than that to which it aspires—in the active life, for example, rather than the contemplative.

In this case it is doubtless wise to make the time of trial longer and more rigorous; but if the attraction persists with all the signs of a Divine call, it must be remembered that the wisdom of man is always limited, and that the judgments of God are very different from ours—*Non enim cogitationes meæ cogitationes vestræ: neque viae vestræ, viae meæ* (Isa. Iv. 8)—and we must not fight against the Holy Spirit of God.

264. The absence of aptitude is a sign of non-vocation, for when God destines one of His creatures for some manner of life, or any situation whatever, His Providence provides the necessary means for that end. And this is so true that even when the attraction has all the marks of an inspiration from God, in case of inaptitude we should pay no heed to it, for, as we said above, God may, for the sanctification of souls, inspire them with desires which He does not wish to see fulfilled. Nevertheless, let us remark that when a seriously tested attraction appears vested with all the marks of a Divine attraction, the incapacity of the subject must not be lightly pronounced

upon. As St. Frances of Sales wrote to a Superior of the Visitation : "It is pitiful sometimes how people confine themselves to purely human considerations in these questions. One would say that vocations were made by the contrivances of natural wisdom, so much worldly policy do they mingle with them. It is always the poor rejected ones who have had blessing and increase, like Lia, Hannah, and others" (*Letter* of July 24, 1621). Let us note, in passing, that St. Francis of Sales says the same thing of the foundation and erection of monasteries, and that his doctrine may be applied to every holy enterprise. How many times, when it is a question of works which are to the glory of God, do we allow ourselves to be guided by "worldly policy"! how many times do we lean solely upon "the contrivances of natural wisdom"!

The Saint expressed the same thought to St. Jane Frances : "My dearest Mother, with regard to what you write me about the reception of daughters in religion, there is *extreme danger* of relying too much upon human prudence, and resting too much upon nature and too little on the grace of God. I have great difficulty in preventing any attention being paid to the weakness of constitution and bodily infirmity. If they had their way, neither the one-eyed, the lame, nor the sick would come to the marriage-feast. In short, it is hard to fight against the human spirit on the side of abjection and pure charity."

265. *Positive Marks of Vocation.*—The true, the great, mark of the Divine call, or, rather, the Divine call itself, then, is the attraction, the inclination, implanted by God in the human heart, that actual, preventive, stimulating grace which makes it aspire to the more perfect mode of life to which it is predestined for all eternity.

This attraction is not always manifested at the outset. The ways of Divine Providence, as manifold even as they are wise, may order events in such a fashion as to prepare the accomplishment of its designs before the supernatural attraction has clearly shown itself.

We see it, for example, leading certain persons to the threshold of a cloister or to the door of the seminary before they are aware of any really lively desire for the life which is to be theirs. This is usually because those souls are still too weak, not sufficiently loving, or too full of worldly thoughts to feel that attraction for sacrifice which their vocation supposes. They have, indeed, some idea, some slight desire, to give themselves to God, but the love of pleasure and earthly joys overlie and stifle these feelings ; it is a long way from these vague aspirations to the ardent desires, the sweet and powerful attraction, which generous hearts experience.

But if it is slow to exhibit itself, the attraction will none the less appear when detachment has increased and the soul, purified, freed from its evil inclinations, has become more fitted to receive the inspirations of grace.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DIVINE ATTRACTION.

266. The attraction planted by God in the hearts of His creatures is distinguished from the false attraction which comes from nature, or even from the devil, in that it is lasting and peaceful, supernatural in its motives and salutary in its effects.

Lasting.—We have mentioned perseverance as one of the most unmistakable marks of Divine inspiration, while inconstancy and instability characterize the aspirations which have their source in nature or diabolic suggestion. This persistence of the attraction does not, however, exclude temptations and passing revulsions of feeling, due to nature and the Evil One. It is not astonishing that nature shrinks from the sacrifices which God demands of it—*non est subjecta, nec enim potest*¹—neither is it strange that the devil should oppose the execution of a design which

¹ "The wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be" (Rom. viii. 7).

tends immediately to God's glory and the sanctification of the soul. It is, moreover, easy to determine if this reluctance, with regard to a vocation which was formerly desired, has a bad origin. The soul, indeed, inclined to tepidity and slackness, no longer possesses the interior peace in which it formerly rejoiced ; it feels dissatisfied with itself.

If, then, while the soul remains fervent, the attraction persists, if the opposition or the difficulties which the vocation encounters do not lessen it in any degree, it is a sign of God's will, "since He continues His inspirations amidst so many contradictions" (St. Francis of Sales, *Letter*, July 6, 1614).

267. *Peaceful.*—The Divine inspirations, as we have said, produce peace and contentment, unlike the incitations of nature, in which the imagination always plays the greater part, and an anxious and restless uneasiness results. The supernatural attraction leaves the heart at peace, the spirit in repose ; it does not cause that excessive, clamorous enthusiasm which denotes an exalted imagination, and declines to see difficulties. Under its influence the will pursues the object of its desires, not with a fixity of purpose and an obstinacy full of pride and illusion, but with a calm and peaceful determination. It is ready to face obstacles which it does not under-rate, and to accomplish sacrifices all the bitterness of which it foresees.

It is true that the imagination may join forces with the operations of grace, and that movements of self-love or fantastic representations may intermingle with the inspirations of God's Holy Spirit. Occasional bursts of enthusiasm, which are evidently the work of nature, then result. At intervals of repose, when the imagination is calm and the heart tranquil, especially during times of recollection and prayer, such as at the moment of Communion, the attraction continues with the characters to which we have referred above, and we recognize the real impulse of grace which exists under all this natural activity. If it were

purely natural and imaginary, it would fall away suddenly, to reappear again, a mere sport of the imagination, while in moments of calm, when grace alone held sway, it would no longer have any taste of vocation, if, indeed, it gave a thought to the matter.

268. *Supernatural in its Motives.*—We sometimes distinguish between the attraction of reason and the attraction of inclination. The former, as its name indicates, resides rather in the mind than in the heart, and would consist in a firm and well-grounded resolution, determined by weighty motives, to give itself to God. The second would be rather instinctive and independent of any kind of reasoning. But in reality these things are not so clearly divided, and every supernatural attraction affects the entire soul. In some persons, however, the intelligence, and in others the heart, is more actively affected, and these latter feel a pronounced liking, a lively inclination, which has not apparently been reasoned out. But even these have some aim in view. They have more or less avowed but real motives which make them aspire to a more perfect way of life. But in judging the value of a vocation, one of the most useful things to know is the exact nature of the motives that inspire it; if they are supernatural, such as the thought of ensuring salvation, or of procuring God's greater glory, they constitute an excellent presumption in favour of the vocation, which would then certainly appear to be the work of grace.

The attraction, as we have already said, does not always appear at first clothed in all the characters of a Divine origin. At the outset the motives of vocation may not be very pure and disinterested. Let us hear St. Francis of Sales on this point : "With regard to this young lady's vocation, I consider it good, although it is intermingled with several imperfections . . . and it would be desirable for her to have come to God simply and purely for the good of being entirely His. But God does not draw all those whom He calls to Himself with equal motives ; so

there are few who come to His service solely for the sake of being His and of serving Him. Amongst the women whose vocation is mentioned in the Gospel, there was only Magdalen who came through love and with love. The adulteress came to Him by reason of her public exposure, as the Samaritan woman because of her private shame. The woman of Canaan came in order to be solaced in her temporal affliction ; St. Paul, the first hermit, when fifteen years old, withdrew into his retreat to avoid persecution ; St. Ignatius of Loyola was drawn by tribulation, and so with a hundred others. We must not wish all to commence by perfection. It matters little how we begin, provided we are quite resolved to go on well and to end well. . . . There are some souls who would never have entered religion if the world had smiled upon them, and whom we see, nevertheless, quite disposed to feel contempt for the vanity of the age " (*Letter to a Superior of the Visitation*, dated from Annecy).

But if it is not perfect from the outset, the attraction becomes purer as the soul shows itself more fervent. It then becomes less sensible to these lower reasons and more desirous for spiritual good.

It is strange, and yet true, that we must exact a stronger attraction from a very fervent person than from one who is imperfect. When a fervent soul is predestined to a more perfect life the appeals of grace (which in such a case are unopposed) always make themselves actively felt. If they were weak, they would by that very fact be open to suspicion.

Besides, ardent souls often form an idea of embracing the religious life without having a real attraction to it. Being very anxious to give themselves entirely to the service of God, fearing in their love that they cannot do enough for Him, they come, as it were, naturally to ask themselves if they ought not to push their self-sacrifice to the very end, and leave the world. Nevertheless, we see quite well that there is no vocation, for all this takes

place in the mind, and the will fails to experience that strong, gentle action which is a sign of the Divine operation. In the midst of their perplexities these souls remain unconcerned, and are even always inwardly convinced in their hearts that they were not made for the religious life.

269. *Salutary in its Effects.*—*A fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos* (By their fruits ye shall know them). We recognize that the attraction is the work of God's Holy Spirit by its excellent effects. Whilst the empty projects, the fancies of vocation, which come from nature do not produce any result in the conduct of life, and whilst the suggestions of the Evil One always have deplorable consequences, the Divine attraction, understood and accepted by a righteous soul, conduces to fervour, excites to devotion, and renders it more vigilant, more humble, and more eager for sacrifice. If we see a soul ardently desiring the religious life or the priesthood, praying continually to obtain it, working generously to render itself worthy of it, it is an excellent sign. A desire which has the result of making anyone pray more and become better, cannot be suggested by the devil : it can only come from God.

In short, when any director is questioned concerning a vocation, he must begin by making his penitent wait. He will reply that he who wishes for a decision in so delicate a matter must first and above all establish himself in piety. It is, in fact, much more difficult to distinguish the inspirations which really come from God in an imperfect soul.

Not only would it be imprudent to pronounce a decision straightway, but we think it would be even better for the director to seem to have no leanings on one side or another. The idea of a vocation may be only a product of the imagination. In that case, if a director should appear too favourable to it, he would be influencing his penitent quite in the wrong direction. On the other hand, it may happen that a true and really supernatural attraction is combated by some soul that is wanting in generosity. If, by way of

trying it, the spiritual father should begin by discouraging it, he would confirm it in its resistance to grace, and would be in danger of preventing the accomplishment of God's designs. "Let him advise these souls at first not to occupy themselves too much with the thought of their vocation, but to think rather of their sanctification, and to let the matter rest, leaving it in God's hands. But let him not absolutely forbid them to mention the matter or repulse them by raillery or harsh words. He may warn them to keep watch over the imagination, but not tell them that their ideas are pure imagination. Those who have not a real vocation will thus forget their project little by little, because an imaginary movement or a natural attraction which is not perpetually fed and kept alive by something fresh does not endure, while a true vocation perseveres. I will even say that when a taste for a vocation is obviously productive of spiritual good in the soul, and leads it to self-renunciation, some ground for hope should be given it from the outset, and some word be said to it from time to time, although care should be taken not to set the imagination to work" (*Venerable Father Libermann, Letter to the Director of a Seminary*, December 15, 1835).

Even if great imperfections should still remain in those who display these desires for a perfect life, we must not conclude that there is no vocation if they have made up their minds to combat them. "For, after all, if we would only receive souls with whom there would be no trouble, the religious orders would scarcely be of much use to our neighbour, since these souls would do well almost anywhere" (*Letter of St. Francis of Sales to St. Jane Frances*, May 13, 1615).

When the penitent has given proof of perseverance, when his good dispositions are confirmed, when in concert with his director he has prayed earnestly for knowledge concerning his vocation, he must then try to attain to a state of holy indifference, ready to do what God wishes. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. He awaiteth only a sign

from Thine hand, a word from Thy mouth. *Paratum cor meum, Deus.* My heart is ready, O my God—ready for every sacrifice, for it counts upon the power of Thy grace."

When the penitent possesses these excellent dispositions, it will become easy to recognize by the marks given above if his vocation is supernatural, and only the pleasant task of encouraging him to follow out God's call faithfully will remain to the director.

PART III.—AFFECTIVE PRAYER

CHAPTER I

DESCRIPTION OF THIS PRAYER

§ I. *The Doctrine of Spiritual Writers concerning Affective Prayer.*

270. To the prayer of meditation affective prayer usually succeeds. It is, as we have said, a form of prayer in which reasoning has a less share than in discursive prayer, the heart playing the greater part. The considerations also are fewer, and the feelings more ardent. "In the second kind of prayer, called affective prayer," says Father Lallemand, "we make more use of the affections of the will than of the considerations of the intellect." "Affective prayer," says Father Meynard, "is an elevation of the soul to God by different acts of the will. Considerations are not completely excluded from this way of prayer, but are present principally in the form of preparations, and are but little developed. It is the will which is the prime mover" (*Treatise on the Interior Life*, i. 168).

The acts which the heart produces in this prayer spring, for the most part, from feelings of adoration, praise, gratitude, compassion for our Lord's sufferings, desire for virtue,

contrition for sin, humility, etc. They occur frequently in meditation, but they arise less spontaneously. The meditative soul is still deficient in love, and has to incite itself to these acts laboriously, and by long and multiplied arguments, while the affective soul produces them easily by way of short meditations, and finds great pleasure and delight in expressing them.

271. This kind of prayer is very common. "Generally speaking," says St. Balthasar Alvarez, "the method of praying by affections, with few considerations, is the one most in vogue." And Father Surin, asking in his Catechism, "When should we enter upon this affective prayer?" replies: "When a disposition to converse with God is present, and is combined with facility, we must rarely resort to considerations—that is to say, reasoning." The great mystical writers do not employ this term "affective prayer." It is not found in the works of St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, or St. Francis of Sales. They do not distinguish it from discursive prayer, because in it there are to be found deliberate considerations which give rise to affections of the will. But if they do not make it a distinct degree of prayer, they cannot reject the fact of its existence. Father Meynard (*Treatise on the Inner Life*, i. 168), writing on the subject of affective prayer, observes that in some ancient writers affective prayer appears to be confounded with contemplation. In fact, it often happens that in the ardent outpourings of affective prayer considerations play only a small part, the soul not pausing to make them. Being firmly convinced of the truth which is the object of its fervours, nothing would be gained by going into it more deeply. It therefore occupies itself solely in protesting its feelings or expressing its needs. Certain authors, recognizing no other methods of prayer but meditation and contemplation, and not stopping at that intermediary degree which we call affective prayer, have seen in this latter a kind of inferior contemplation, which they have called acquired contemplation.

272. We have said that though affective prayer has often been described by the great mystic writers, yet they have not called it by that name. Later (289) we shall quote a passage from St. Teresa where she treats of this prayer with no less accuracy than charm. The prayer of recollection of which the Saint speaks in chapters xxviii. and xxix. of the *Way of Perfection* is likewise a form of affective prayer.

"St. Augustine," she says, "after searching everywhere for God, found Him at length within his own heart. In order to hold communion with our Divine Father we need not, therefore, ascend up to heaven, nor is it necessary to speak aloud in order to enjoy the happiness of being with Him. . . . He is so near to us that He will hear us. We do not need wings to go after Him. Let us retire into a solitary place, direct our gaze inwardly; let us not go far away from so lovable a Guest, but with feelings of profound humility let us speak to Him like children. Let us show Him our wishes as to a father, and tell Him our troubles, ask Him to remedy them, realize that we are not worthy to be His children. . . . This kind of prayer is called the prayer of recollection, because the soul collects together all its powers—that is, it holds captive both the understanding, in which it permits no useless considerations, and the imagination, whose frivolous creations it dissipates. It enters into itself in company with its God. . . . Thus recollected, it may think of the Passion, picture to itself the Son of God present within it, offer Him to His Father."

So in this prayer the object is to move the heart and produce affective acts. "In Jesus Christ," says the Saint in the same place, "see a Father, a Brother, a Master, a Bridegroom, and comport yourself with Him accordingly. But in order to excite these pious sentiments in the will, we must first set the imagination to work; so, in a manner, by our own industry we obtain a prayer which is of the utmost profit to our souls." This, according to St. Teresa,

is an exceedingly speedy way of arriving at contemplation.

A form of prayer of which St. Alphonsus treats (*Praxis Conf.*, No. 127), and which he calls by the same name as St. Teresa, *di racoglimento*, does not differ from that of which we have just spoken, and is equally a form of affective prayer : *Quodnam tempus opportunius bonis faciendis actibus voluntatis*. Could any moment be more propitious for producing meritorious acts in the will ?

273. And, further, we class with affective prayer the prayer of supernatural recollection which St. Teresa refers to (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. iii.). It is truly the entrance to contemplation, "the foundation of the prayer of Divine delights," and the vestibule, as it were, through which we must pass before we can attain to it—*es principio para venir a ella*—but it is not yet contemplation properly so called. In fact, according to the Saint, the soul, although finding itself recollected without any effort, without any exertion, which condition is doubtless the result of a perfectly free gift from God, is not yet united to Him by love ; it must bring forth, with the aid of pious reflections and devout considerations, those acts of charity and those resolutions which constitute its prayer. "God," says St. Teresa again, "requires of us in this state that we should address our petitions to Him, that we should consider ourselves as in His presence. . . . We could not then check the movements of the understanding—discontinue our considerations, that is—without more harm than good resulting."

It is because of the supernatural element which enters into this form of prayer (we refer to that recollection which we obtain without effort, by a pure gift of the Divine goodness) that many writers consider it to be a kind of contemplative prayer. We think that it may be more correct to regard it as a prayer of affection, and to say that affective prayer, when it attains its full height, comprises certain gifts which may be considered as being to some

extent passive (Venerable Father Libermann, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 168).

So we see that it is not always easy, or even possible, to distinguish between these different degrees of prayer: affective prayer sometimes minglest with meditation; sometimes, on the other hand, it borders on contemplation. To give its distinctive marks is not an easy task. We will, however, make the attempt.

§ 2. *Distinguishing Characteristics of Affective Prayer.*

274. Amongst the chief marks of affective prayer Father Libermann notes the *sensible* impressions of grace which affect the soul and fill it with sweet and lively emotions. When these impressions become frequent, they are indeed a proof that the soul, possessed and illumined by grace, has no longer such need of lengthy considerations before it can decide to serve God, and that discursive prayer, is no longer suited to it. But how are we to distinguish these consolations of the affective soul from the delights which the contemplative soul enjoys? The venerable author emphatically declares that grace acts particularly and more directly upon the senses in affective prayer, whilst in contemplation it acts by means of intellectual impressions, coming into immediate contact with the depths of the soul, and, as it were by rebound, upon the senses. But since in both cases the senses may be touched and the sensitive appetite charmed and delighted, we have not here a distinctive mark which is very easy to discern.

He equally insists upon the vehement character of the prayer of affection, contrasted with the calm of contemplation. It is true that the *ordinary* state of affective souls is vehement, and the ordinary state of souls united to God is calm. All are in accord here. But this, however, would not be an infallible test. There is, in fact, a very peaceful kind of affective prayer, and there is, on the contrary,

the spiritual intoxication, those transports described by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross as being a form of contemplation which acts violently upon the soul.

275. St. Teresa, dealing with the same subject, and wishing to distinguish between what she calls the contentments of meditation and the delights of contemplation, compares the former to the joy which we feel at the announcement of some happy news, or on the occasion of some good fortune (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. i.). There must, then, be a natural cause, some thought, in a word, some reason, to give them birth, and in this sense they are natural. "They begin in ourselves," says the Saint, "and end in God, whilst the delights have their beginning in God,¹ and move us much more profoundly."

"As for the Divine pleasures," she says elsewhere (chap. ii.), "it is by our thoughts, by the consideration of the works of God, by the labour of our understanding, that we obtain them. They are the fruits of our industry, of our efforts. The Divine delights are like that water which, rising from its very source, which is God, bubbles up into the basin of the soul, without any need, consequently, of preliminary consideration. St. John of the Cross explains clearly the cause of this phenomenon." In this (contemplative) state it is God Who acts, while the soul receives. God is instructing the soul and infusing into it, by way of contemplation, those highly spiritual blessings which are the Divine knowledge and the Divine love in one (*Living Flame*, stanza 3, verses 3 and 5).

So in the affective state we know the origin, the cause, of the consolations that we experience ; we are able to explain what moves us and what charms us. We see, for instance, that it is the thought of our Lord's Passion, the desire for virtue, etc.

In the contemplative state the delights are much less

¹ *Los contentos comienzan de nuestro natural mismo, y acaban en Dios. Los gustos comienzan de Dios, y sientelos el natural, y goza tanto dellos, como gozan los que tengo dichos, y mucho mas.*

explicable. They often arise without any well-determined cause, and even if they are accompanied by pious thoughts and holy considerations, we know quite well that these would not suffice to produce them. What we shall say with regard to contemplative prayer will make this much clearer.

276. There is another ground of distinction which does not, it is true, hold good with regard to the nature of these two kinds of prayer, but which may be of assistance in enabling us to distinguish between them: this is the different tendencies and dispositions which they promote. The prayer of affection tends to the practice of virtue.¹ The affective² soul, still backward in the practice of detachment, is still largely preoccupied with itself. But strongly illumined by faith, and feeling the first ardour of charity, it desires and seeks after its spiritual welfare and the attainment of more solid virtues; it is eager to amass much merit, and it is from that point of view especially that it asks God to make it better.

The contemplative soul looks upon God rather than upon itself. It delights in the thought of His perfections, burns with a desire to see Him glorified, and, above all, is filled with a profound and peaceful love for the Divine will. If it also ardently desires its own sanctification, it is out of love for its God, and in order to serve Him better, rather than for the satisfaction of seeing itself more perfect, and thus, even in its petitions, although apparently self-interested, love still dominates it.

277. We said (No. 198), in common with Father Lallemand and Father Surin, that affective prayer is suited to the illuminative life. Indeed, in order to practise it, we must already have some love for God, some beginnings of

¹ Cf. Libermann, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 523.

² It is true that this is not the academical sense of the word "affective." The reader will forgive our employing it, for it is easy to understand, and says concisely what it would otherwise be necessary to express in a number of words.

detachment ; the soul must be freed from the obstacles of the purgative life before the sweet operations of grace can come into play. If we are still at the earliest stages of our struggles with sin, if the spirit is still entirely engrossed by a thousand temporal preoccupations, a thousand worldly cares, how can we feel those pious sentiments, those holy desires, that familiarity with God, full of love and simplicity, which characterizes affective prayer ?

§ 3. How the Affective Sentiments are more or less Intense.

278. If affective prayer is fitted for souls in the illuminative life, it does not attain to the same degree of perfection in all alike. As we have already said at the beginning of this third part, the sensible impressions of grace are more or less active according to the strength of the assistance granted by Providence, the abundance of the lights communicated, and also according to the more or less favourable dispositions of the soul itself.

Here we think it would be useful to borrow Father Libermann's description of the feelings of an affective soul favoured with these sensible graces in an intense degree.

"In this state the impression or touch of the grace received varies : sometimes it is an impression of joy, sometimes of sorrow, sometimes of love, sometimes of compassion, etc. It varies according to the mysteries or the diversity of the subject."

"Generally, and almost universally, these souls occupy themselves in the consideration of the mysteries of our Lord, in which they find all their pleasure and delight. Usually the mysteries of the Church make a deep impression on these souls, the result of which is that they celebrate these feasts with extraordinary happiness and devotion, and the approach of a great feast is an immense joy to them. Benediction, a High Mass, or procession, fills them with transports of love for our Lord in the Most

Holy Sacrament, this impression usually varying according to the object and circumstances (*Writings*, p. 157).

279. "Although the soul in this state," says the Venerable Father in another place, "enjoys very great delights, this does not prevent it from frequently experiencing a lively inner sorrow; but these sorrows are so full of delight, and so great and violent is the hidden joy within them, that we can form no idea of them without experiencing them. These sorrows have their source in different objects.

"There is one that has its origin in past sins. This is almost universal, especially in souls which the Divine mercy has just rescued from sin. They are overwhelmed with grief at having offended their God Whom they love so ardently. The violence of their grief is measured by the intensity of their love, for this impression of grief is an impression of love, and the violence of the joy is in proportion to this grief. Some souls are haunted by this grief day and night; it never leaves them for an instant, rising and lying down with them, in recreation as in the exercises of devotion, at study as at prayer. This state is more or less prolonged, according to the will of Him Who has permitted it. Some souls remain in this state from a year to eighteen months, others for a longer or shorter period.

"Another form of grief comes from the desire of obtaining some grace, acquiring some virtue, after which the soul is continually sighing. It is impossible to give any adequate idea of the groanings, aspirations, and violent longings which crucify it on beholding some virtue in which it is lacking. The joy hidden in the heart of this grief is exquisite, and differs from that which is to be found in the grief of contrition. It is less violent, and participates more in the languor of the soul which aspires after this virtue, but it is more exquisite and sweet. A third grief arises from the sight of the Cross and the sufferings of our Lord. It is of quite another kind, and of an entirely different

flavour. In this grief the joy is of an almost incredible intensity, and is incomparably more exquisite than the two former.

"The fruits of these griefs are very great and desirable. The first engenders a great horror of sin and extreme hatred of the world. It purifies the soul wonderfully, and gives it the love of God ; it disposes it also to meditation, and to a participation in our Lord's Cross. The second attaches us strongly to God, brings about humility of soul, and leads to the attainment of the virtue so much desired. The third and most excellent generates a great love of the Cross and of suffering, with a continual yearning after them. It strengthens the soul in the love of our Lord, detaches it from all creatures and from itself, and leads it directly to contemplation" (*Writings*, p. 163).

280. "I believe that the great devotion of these souls is generally towards the Blessed Sacrament, and this is a very happy thing. They would like to spend the whole day before their Divine Master ; their desire for Him is intense, and fills them continually with transports of love towards the Blessed Sacrament. Their visits are ardent, and their longings to receive the Holy Communion are beyond expression. These desires and this devotion increase as they advance in this state. Their preparation is ardent, and they await the day on which they are to approach Him with real impatience, unable to bear delay. The effects of Holy Communion and its fruits are very considerable, and fill these souls with new strength and new desires. It produces the most powerful impressions. The presence of our Lord makes itself felt with the utmost vividness" (*Writings*, p. 196).

281. We see, then, that affective souls may be acted on in very different ways. Some think more of our Lord, following Him in His mysteries ; others regard Him in the Holy Eucharist ; others think particularly of their own spiritual needs. These of their past life, the sins of which they deplore ; those of the salvation of their neighbours,

etc. "A director's first care," says Father Libermann, "is to discern these different attractions of the various souls, and to favour them in every respect; to speak to them from the standpoint of that attraction, and to take great care not to dissuade them from it, or to inspire another object in its place. If this attraction is less perfect than that which the director might wish, it matters nothing; the soul must remain in it" (*Writings*, p. 165).

282. The reader will perhaps inquire if these forms of prayer described by the Venerable Father Libermann are not already contemplative, and contain the elements of mystic prayer. The venerable author does not seem to think so. According to him, these impressions are only sensible; the soul would not then receive in them the superior lights of faith (the fruit of the gift of understanding), or experience that direct action of the Holy Spirit on the will which characterizes contemplative and mystical prayer. It would not then have more light than it can acquire by means of considerations directed on the truths of religion, and love would not be infused, but obtained by reflections aided only by the sensible impressions which accompany them.

It is certain that we sometimes meet with this ardent prayer in those who are still novices in fervour and scarcely freed from the things of sense, not having in any way passed through the aridity which purifies the soul and introduces it to the mystical state, if it remains faithful. This prayer is very like that of the contemplatives, for, as Father Libermann shows, these souls are rather urged on by grace than excited by themselves. They are more passive than active. It would seem, then, as though some mystic graces were vouchsafed to them, and we think that it would be difficult to prove that they do not receive any such. It is, however, true that in these persons grace does not penetrate very deeply. It acts more especially upon the surface of the soul and the sensible part. We see this in the sentiments which it excites, more vehement,

but less solid and lasting than those of real contemplatives, and the delights which it produces are not so profound as the satisfaction and inner peace which contemplation brings. We see it, above all, in the case of trials, for these persons do not yet bear them with courage and firmness. They are generous and enthusiastic under the influence of these urgent graces, but when the sensible impressions cease nature regains its dominion, and they find that they are still weak. Later, when they have been deprived of consolations for a sufficiently long time, when they have struggled bravely and have borne all the trials of the contemplative life with faith, confidence, and love (no longer stopping for the assistance of the sensible appetite in order to pray and practise virtue, but accustomed to act by the supreme part of their noblest faculties), they will be stronger and more steadfast. Then, in the moments consecrated to prayer, grace, now usually of less vehemence, but greater intensity, will penetrate them more fully, will pour into the very depths of the soul light and impulses of love which will unite them more directly to God ; then their prayer will be, beyond all doubt, mystic and contemplative.

These points understood, practical rules for affective prayer will be easily deduced.

CHAPTER II

PRACTICAL RULES FOR AFFECTIVE PRAYER

§ I. *Preparation.*

283. BECAUSE the minds of those persons of whom we are speaking, especially the most fervent, are often filled with spiritual preoccupations, they are sometimes tempted to take this disposition of the soul as a sufficient preparation. They will think, for example, of the means of making pro-

gress, or of aiding others to advance in virtue. Now, these are indeed good thoughts, but not sufficient to establish the soul in the state of prayer. They lead more readily to pious reveries than to real prayer. We must always, then, place ourselves in spirit at God's feet, in an attitude of respect and supplication.

This preparation will be longer or shorter, and will require more or less effort, according to circumstances. "It will sometimes happen that unexpectedly, after your preparation, your affections will be greatly kindled towards God. Then, Philothea, you must give them the loose rein, without attempting to follow the method I have given you; for, although considerations should ordinarily precede the affections and resolutions, yet, if it should happen that the Holy Spirit gives you the affections before the considerations, you must not go after considerations, since their only purpose is to stir up the affections. In short, whenever affections offer themselves, you should receive them and give them place, whether they happen before or after the considerations. . . . And this applies not only to the other affections, but also to the acts of thanksgiving, oblation, and petition which may be made during the considerations, for they must not be restrained any more than the other affections, although afterwards, at the conclusion of the meditation, they must be repeated" (*Devout Life*, ii. 8).

"When we want a light," St. Vincent de Paul once said to his priests, "we use a steel, we strike it, and as soon as the fire has caught the prepared material we light our candle, and he would look foolish who, having once lighted his candle, continued to strike the steel; so just in the same way, when a soul is sufficiently enlightened by considerations, what need is there to seek after others, and strike our spirit again and again to multiply reasons and thoughts? Do you not see that it is a waste of time, and that then we should set to work to enkindle our will?" (*His Life*, by Abelly).

§ 2. The Substance of the Prayer.

284. The subjects best suited to souls vary according to their particular attraction. *Many pious souls make the great mistake of wishing, like beginners, to follow their books of meditation line by line, and in keeping strictly to the thoughts and affections suggested to them, and which at times correspond neither to their dispositions nor to their needs.* “As animals fastened to a stake can only go to the length of their tether, and then afterwards go wearily turning round and round, so these persons bind themselves down to a certain number of points so straitly that it is pitiable to see them. . . . He would not be on familiar terms with a man who, before going to visit him, should prepare three points to lay before him, without daring to venture farther ; and, likewise, it would be a continual hell to be kept shut up within the bounds of a premeditated discourse, but intimacy demands that, after having finished your business (if you have any), you should talk to him in a free and friendly manner, responding to any opening given you by the goodness of him with whom you are dealing ” (Surin, *Catechism*, vol. i., part ii., chap. ii.).

Pious persons, already intimate with our Lord, should not be such slaves to their books of meditation and the subjects suggested to them. Let them apply themselves to the fundamental points of Christian perfection—the love of our Lord, recollection, patience, detachment—in order to enkindle their desires and render their demands more fervent ; let them make use either of the examples of the Saints, or of such books of devotion as touch them most, or, which is always better, the mysteries of the life and especially of the Passion of Jesus Christ. They will then choose the most practical subjects, attaching themselves by preference to the considerations which move them the most, and having reference always to their particular needs.

285. This is what Father Surin very rightly teaches :

"The soul which God has touched sees and recognizes that its own amendment is its principal business. In order to obtain this, it judges two or three things to be absolutely necessary—namely, recollection, the mortification of the passions and appetites, and the disentangling of the heart from all creatures. First of all, when it is at prayer, having placed itself in God's presence, and having conceived the desire of pleasing Him, it begins, as we have said, with all its strength to see and make trial of the necessity for recollection. It goes fully into this, thinking of the ways and means, opportunities and obstacles, to this blessing. It desires it, and earnestly asks it of God with the most fervent petitions, and does not leave the matter until it has exhausted it. Afterwards it may take another subject—mortification—and will see and search into the good which results from dying to its passions, appetites, tastes, and satisfactions. It may form an affection and a desire for this good, considering the occasions when it may be practised, and in this way really begin to die unto itself.

"Further, this soul must strive after detachment from creatures, placing itself in God's presence, with the design of denuding itself of everything ; then it should think what there is in the world which can engage its heart and affections. First, the Holy Spirit of God, Who is good and faithful, will show it the attachment that it has to its honour, its possessions, its employment, or some person or other whom it loves. If the soul to whom these things are revealed in prayer is true, it will say : 'Lord, all this I give Thee.' It will make a hundred acts of renunciation ; it will think how to strip itself entirely, and will so often say that it desires to possess nothing that at length it will find itself free. This is the right manner of prayer. Those who do otherwise, and take a different subject each day, sometimes turning to one thing, sometimes to another, do not reap so great a reward as those who devote themselves to these foundations of the spiritual life, weighing them and feeding on them for months and even years. Thus,

finally, they will stand possessed of all the principal points of our Lord's teaching. Then some day, when they do not expect it, they will find themselves rich in spirit, and God will promote them to greater advantages and a higher manner of prayer" (*Spiritual Catechism*, vol. ii., part vii., chap. i.).

286. "That," says Father Surin, "is the best method of prayer for persons fully determined to refuse God nothing, but who, nevertheless, have still some imperfections to correct and some virtues to acquire." These are they whom, in this work, we call "fervent souls." As for those who are not so resolute, but who are rather cowardly, half-hearted, and lagging in imperfections, against which they do not really strive, we have called this the state of simple piety, and the best course to take with them is to make them beg God unceasingly to give them this whole-hearted will, and to strive to gain it by every kind of consideration.

Let these souls not fear to ask much. A prayer entirely spent in asking would be excellent. Those who are troubled and think everything lost when they have not thoroughly fathomed the points of a meditation must be reassured. "You do nothing, you say, in prayer," wrote St. Francis of Sales to a lady, "but what do you wish to do, except that which you are doing—showing again and again your nothingness and your poverty to God? The finest appeal which beggars can make to us is to lay bare to us all their sores and necessities" (*Letter*, vol. vi., p. 383, ed. Briday).

287. *Resolutions*.—Affective souls must not neglect resolutions. They must cultivate a devotion towards those which respond to their particular attraction and needs, and then, rather than change them, repeat them constantly.

CHAPTER III

THE SOULS FOR WHICH AFFECTIVE PRAYER IS SUITABLE

288. AFFECTIVE prayer is particularly adapted to the illuminative life. Nevertheless, it may be profitably recommended to some persons who have not yet emerged from the purgative life, and who are more disposed to hold converse with our Lord than to reflect upon abstract subjects. St. Vincent de Paul wished the sick to pray by placing themselves quietly in God's presence, forming repeated acts of resignation, conformity to the Divine will, contrition for their sins, patience, confidence in the Divine goodness, thanksgiving for His benefits, love of God, and such-like. This, in his opinion, was the only kind of prayer suitable to their state. There are many Christians who do not wish to be tied down to meditation properly so called, but who will accept this method.

289. Let us hear the advice which St. Teresa gave to her daughters upon the subject : " Before beginning your prayer you should first examine your conscience, then say the *Confiteor*. This done, try immediately, my daughters, since you are alone, to find a companion. But what companionship could be preferable to that of the Divine Master, Who Himself has taught you the prayer that you are about to say ? Consider this adorable Saviour as being by your side, and with what humility He deigns to instruct you. I counsel you to remain in the company of so excellent a Friend as long as you may. If you form a habit of keeping yourself in His presence, and if He sees that you do so through a continual wish to please Him, you will no longer be able, as they say, to drive Him from you.

" O my sisters, you who cannot discourse much with the understanding, nor occupy yourselves with any subject without troublesome distractions, form, I pray you—form this salutary habit that I am speaking of. I know you

can do so. I know it from my own experience. For several years I grieved because I could not fix my mind upon one single truth during the hour of prayer. This, I admit, is a very great trial, but if we humbly implore our Lord to remove it, believe that He will hear our entreaties, in His infinite kindness He cannot make up His mind to leave us alone in this way, and He will wish to bear us company. If one year is not sufficient for the attainment of this happiness, let us work on for several, and not regret such well-spent time. I repeat, it is in our power to accustom ourselves to work in the presence of our Lord. Let us make generous efforts, and in the end we shall have the consolation of enjoying the company of this true Master of our souls.

“ Do not think, however, that I ask you to make long meditations upon this Divine Saviour, nor many great and subtle considerations. Simply look upon Him. If you cannot do more, at least keep the eyes of your soul fixed for some instants upon this adorable Bridegroom. . . . He never turns His eyes away from you. Despite all the indignities of which you have been guilty towards Him, never for one single instant has He ceased to follow you with His eyes, and you would think that you were doing something great if, turning away your own eyes from exterior things, you fixed them a few moments upon Him Who has loved you so much. . . . Are you happy ? Think of Him risen to life again. The mere sight of Him coming forth from the sepulchre will make you tremble with delight. What splendour ! what beauty ! what majesty ! what triumph ! Are you in tribulation or sorrow ? Follow Him to the Garden of Gethsemane. Consider in what an ocean of affliction His soul must be plunged, since, being not only patient, but patience itself, He does not suffer His trouble to be known nor make complaint. Or, again, consider Him bound to the column, become the Man of Sorrows, all His whole body torn with stripes, enduring this torture out of the excess of His love

for you, persecuted by some, spat upon by others, renounced and abandoned by His friends, having no one to defend Him, shivering with the cold, and reduced to such a state of loneliness that you can come, alone and unseen, to mingle your troubles with His, and each console the other. Or, finally, represent to yourself this adorable Saviour bearing His cross and climbing the Hill of Calvary, while the executioners give Him no time even to breathe. He will turn His eyes filled with tears upon you, but oh, the Divine beauty and tender compassion in that look !

" Your heart grows less hard seeing the Divine Bridegroom of your soul in this condition, and, not content with regarding Him, you feel yourselves inwardly urged to hold converse with Him. Do so ; but away with all studied language. Use only simple words, and those dictated by your heart. They possess the greatest value in His eyes. . . .

" One means which will assist you in maintaining yourself in the presence of our Lord is to have an image of this adorable Master according to the individual taste. Do not be satisfied with wearing it without ever looking at it, but keep it continually in view, so that the sight of it may excite you often to hold converse with your Spouse. Be quite sure He Himself will put into your hearts the words you must speak to Him. You feel no embarrassment when you speak to His creatures ; why should you want for words when you converse with your God ? Do not be afraid that this will befall you. For my part, at least, I regard it as impossible, if you are accustomed to hold these colloquies with our Lord. Without this habit it is not astonishing that you should want for words ; for when we are strangers with any person we feel a certain uneasiness in his presence, and do not know what to say to him " (*The Way of Perfection*, chap. xxvii.).

290. We may, then, attain to affective prayer without passing through a course of discursive prayer. " Although the prayer of meditation leads little by little to the prayer of affection, that does not prevent many souls from be-

ginning by the latter, and never being able to apply themselves to meditation" (Libermann, "On the Prayer of Affection," *Writings*, 149).

For many centuries men have prayed without making a methodical use of meditation, as we do nowadays. Further, the rules of the old religious orders do not appear to consider mental prayer as an exercise apart. The life of the monks, divided between the singing of the Psalms and manual labour or study, was none the less a life of complete union with God, full of prayer, but prayer which is affective or contemplative. With regard to considerations and motives of faith, which conduce to the practice of piety and sustain the good-will, if they did not search into them in discursive meditation, they found them, nevertheless, in pious reading, particularly that of Holy Scripture and the Fathers, in conferences and sermons. So history, no less than the authority of the masters, shows that we may, in certain cases, devote ourselves to affective prayer without having gone through a course of meditation.

Usually, however, it is better to follow the beaten track, and begin by meditating upon and sounding the fundamental truths of religion. It will be prudent, therefore, at the commencement of the spiritual life, to keep to the practice of meditation, and only to enter upon affective prayer when the soul, firmly convinced and won over to the love of God, feels more ease in conversing with Him and expressing its desires.

291. When we are able to pray in this loving fashion it is very sweet, and it is the beginning of the Divine favours. Thenceforth the soul becomes more faithful, for it delights therein, and would willingly repeat the dying words of St. Jane Frances: "Prayer is the true happiness of this life." It were well, however, that it should understand that its kind of prayer is not the highest. The souls who experience the ardours of affective prayer, who give themselves up to sweet and loving outpourings, easily imagine that there is no more perfect manner of praying. In this

false persuasion they are exposed to the danger of believing themselves more advanced than they really are, and of feeling contempt for those who complain of their powerlessness in this regard. Later, when the time has come to enter into a new path in which nature is less active and leaves the way more free to the Divine operation, these souls, believing that they are less deserving, when they are in reality only calmer, would be tempted to distress of mind and the opposing of obstacles in the way of the most precious graces.

CHAPTER IV

DIFFICULTIES WHICH ARE MET WITH IN THE PRACTICE OF AFFECTIVE PRAYER

§ 1. *The Causes of Aridities¹—The Conduct to be observed in Aridities.*

292. "BUT this pleasant condition will not last for ever; thus, it will happen that sometimes you will be so deprived and destitute of any sentiment of devotion that you will think that your soul is a desert land, unfruitful and sterile, in which there is neither track nor road which would lead us to God, nor any waters of grace to irrigate it, because of the dryness which threatens to reduce it to a perfect waste" (*Devout Life*, iv. 14).

These drynesses, or aridities, arise "sometimes from some unfaithfulness, some seeking after, or delight in, a creature. Then these souls must be gently treated: they should be obliged to make an examination of themselves and form resolutions upon it, that they may be established

¹ Drynesses are met with in the different degrees of the spiritual life; we are now considering those of the devout soul, not far advanced in detachment, and which, for this reason, is still far from contemplation.

in feelings of self-humiliation before God. We must console them, and give them peace, as far as possible, by rendering them submissive to the will of God, and obedient to his good pleasure.

" Sometimes this is not a consequence of any fault, but God is wishing to try their humility and gentle submission to His Divine will and their fidelity in the midst of dryness. The director should take advantage of these moments to detach them and show them that these sensibilities are by no means all-important, but that they are rather nothing at all, and often only result in our becoming too attached to them ; that it is necessary to give themselves up entirely to God, for perfection consists in this ; that they must make use of all graces in order to be more truly His, and not think themselves more holy because of the greater abundance of these sentiments. Then they will be more capable of understanding these considerations than when they are abounding in joys " (Libermann, *Spiritual Writings*, p. 166).

293. They must then be reminded that grace is not felt, that it may exist in the soul unknown to us, and that sensible impressions and emotions are consequently not grace, but are given to us on account of our weakness, to encourage us to pray, just as people give children jam, which has hardly any nourishment, in order that they may eat the bread, which is a more substantial food ; that fidelity in times of dryness is much more conducive to the soul's progress than prayers which are most full of consolation, because it is the occasion of more steadfast and ardent acts of love. In these moments of aridity, he will add, this is what you should say to God : " My God, it is for Thee, and not myself ; it is to be pleasing in Thy sight, and not for my own satisfaction, that I give myself to this holy exercise of prayer ; I will continue to do so, now that it is a burden to me, as well as when I found all kinds of delights therein, and this will be a sign of love which Thou wilt appreciate the more."

294. In such a case we must continue our efforts. There are persons who, under the pretext that sensible devotion is not necessary to them, give themselves no trouble to excite fervour within themselves. They acquiesce so easily when they find that they are in a state of dryness that they scarcely struggle against distractions, and so they remain without scruples, not only, as they imagine, in a state of aridity, but in a veritable condition of interior dissipation.

We must, on the contrary, strive against vain thoughts, complain lovingly to our Lord, make acts of humility confessing our misery, take a book and read it attentively, until the spirit is freed from its distraction ; or, again, kiss the crucifix, making repeated acts of love. " If, after all this, you are still not consoled, do not be disturbed, however great your dryness may be, but remain devoutly in the presence of your God. How many courtiers are there who go a hundred times a year into the Prince's chamber without any hope of speaking to him, but only to be seen by him and to pay their respects ! So should we come, my dear Philothea, to holy prayer, purely and simply to pay our respects and show our fidelity. When it pleases the Divine Majesty to speak to us, and converse with us by means of His holy inspiration and interior consolations, doubtless it will be a great honour and a most delightful pleasure ; but if it does not please Him to do us this honour, leaving us there without saying anything to us, just as if He did not see us and we were not in His presence, we ought not to go away ; on the contrary, we should remain there before the Sovereign Goodness with a devoted and peaceful demeanour, and then infallibly He will be pleased with our patience and will take notice of our assiduity and perseverance " (*Devout Life*).

§ 2. *Which are the Souls most liable to Aridities ?*

295. When speaking of the Christians of the third degree, we distinguished amongst them—

(1) The beginners who have not been able to make great progress, but whom God treats like little children, giving them, for the encouragement of their good-will, the milk of sensible consolations. Affective prayer, such as we have described, is that which is most suitable for them.

(2) Belated souls, who ought to be more advanced in perfection, but who have remained in the illuminative life, and have not been able to reach the unitive life, because they have not given themselves whole-heartedly to the practice of renunciation. These latter, we said, are very numerous. We showed that at the end of a certain time their sensible impressions become weaker, pious considerations no longer produce the same emotions, and, not having been versed in contemplation, it follows that they are very liable to dryness and aridity.

The greater number, however, understanding the importance of prayer, remain faithful to it, and this fidelity, which is very meritorious, prevents them from falling away.

It is only by the aid of a book, however, that they can continue to practise mental prayer, struggling and fighting against aridity in the way that St. Francis of Sales has described above. They will do well to recommend to God in their prayers the works which contribute to His glory and which they have at heart, always provided that they do not make this an occasion to fall into unprofitable reveries, which would be no longer a prayer, but a mere excursion of the imagination.

§ 3. *Mortification as a Remedy for Dryness—Its Necessity for Prayerful Souls.*

296. Finally, and above all, these persons must realize, and their director cannot too often remind them of it, that they will not taste of the joys of prayer, or draw any benefit from it, unless they apply themselves simultaneously to the practice of mortification. St. Bernard (*Third*

Sermon for the Ascension, No. 7), speaking of those imperfect religious who do not share in the consolation of their more fervent brethren, explains the cause thus : "They seek to procure miserable consolations for their carnal nature by words, actions, or any other means. If for a time they deprive themselves of these, they never entirely renounce them. So . . . their compunction is not continual ; it only lasts a few hours—what do I say ?—a few instants. A soul which is a slave to these preoccupations cannot be satisfied by the visits of the Lord. *Impleri visitationibus Domini anima non potest quæ his distractionibus subjacet.* The more it is able to empty itself of the first, the more will it be filled with the second. If it empties itself generously it will be abundantly filled ; it will receive little if it empties itself little."

" During our prayer," said St. Vincent de Paul to the priests of his company, " I thought within myself how it could come about that some make so little progress in this holy exercise of meditation. There is reason to fear that the cause of this evil lies in the fact that they do not exercise themselves sufficiently in mortification, and that they give too much liberty to their senses. If we read what the wisest masters of the spiritual life have written concerning prayer, we shall see that all unanimously have held that the practice of mortification is absolutely necessary if we would pray well, and that in order to put ourselves in proper dispositions for it we must mortify not only our eyes, tongue, ears, and our other exterior senses, but also the faculties of the soul—the understanding, the memory, and the will. By this means mortification will dispose us to pray well, and reciprocally the prayer will assist us to a right practice of mortification."

" Mortification and prayer," says St. Jane Frances, " are the two wings of a dove on which we may fly away into some holy retreat and find our rest in God, far from the tumult of men. Birds cannot soar aloft with one wing only, so we must not think that with mortification alone,

and without prayer, a soul can take flight that it may rise to God. Mortification without prayer is labour lost ; prayer without mortification is like meat without salt : it easily corrupts. We needs must, then, give our souls these two wings on which to take flight to the heavenly court, where we shall find a fullness of satisfaction of heart in our conversation with God."

"Without mortification," said the Venerable Mary of the Incarnation, "there is no true prayer and no real interior spirit. One must keep step with the other, otherwise we may be suspicious of all our devotions. Mortification and prayer are twin sisters who cannot be parted. If one dies the other likewise perishes" (*Life of the Venerable Mary of the Incarnation*, by the Abbé Chapot, Part ii., chap. v.).

BOOK IV

FOURTH DEGREE—FERVOUR

CHAPTER I

THE PORTRAIT OF A FERVENT SOUL

§ I. *How Fervent Souls comprehend Evangelical Abnegation much better than do Pious Souls.*

297. WE have already explained (150) what the illuminative life is. In this life we distinguish two degrees—the state of simple piety, which we have described, and the state of fervour, of which we have still to speak.

Pious souls, as we have said, not satisfied with avoiding grave sins and ensuring their salvation, have a sincere and constant resolution to apply themselves to the service of God and the practice of the Christian virtues. But, beside these excellent dispositions, there is a regrettable lacuna : *they do not sufficiently understand the renunciation of the Gospel, and do not set themselves to acquire it.* From this, as we have shown, many defects arise.

Fervent souls have a better understanding of Christian abnegation, and strive sincerely to acquire it. Firmly convinced that God has not placed them on the earth for their own enjoyment and satisfaction, but in order to gain heaven by trials and struggles, they seek to deny themselves in everything and always. So we no longer find in them the distressing effects of which we have spoken—that foolish vanity, always full of itself or the slave of

human judgments; that grudging susceptibility; those personal, not to say egotistical, preoccupations which many excellent people introduce into their good works; that excessive love of self, of ease, of comfort, which in too many Christians is allied to an active and profound faith, and which detracts from their really good qualities.

Fervent souls, it is true, have not yet arrived at perfection, but their faults are only trivial, due to frailty, and always sincerely regretted. They no longer proceed from those habitual and permanent dispositions which they disguise from themselves, excuse, or only combat weakly, as in the case of the state of simple piety. The fervent soul knows itself. It does not seek to justify itself in its own eyes, and has a sincere desire of amending those imperfections which it admits and deplores.

§ 2. *Character and Extent of the Charity of Fervent Souls.*

298. The fervent soul will be more effectually portrayed if we show in what respect it is superior to the simply pious soul in the practice of the Christian virtues. We will begin with the first and most important—Charity.

It will not, perhaps, be superfluous to call to mind what theologians say of charity. Every one is bound to love God above all things else; that condition is necessary in order to remain in the state of grace. But what exactly is it to love God more than anything else? To love God more than anything else is, first, to be better disposed to Him than to any other being whatsoever. *Amor objective summus.* In the second place, it is to have so much esteem for, and to hold so much to His affection that we would prefer to lose all rather than be separated from Him. *Amor appetiative summus.*

We may, again, have a more vehement and intense love for God than for anything else, and, indeed, God merits it. It is thus that all the elect in heaven love Him, but not all the just upon earth. God does not command this more

intense love, and the reason given by the theologians is as follows (*cf.* Billuart, *De Charitate*, Diss. iv., Art. i.).

The will is forcibly impelled towards the object of its love in proportion to the strength of the impression which is made upon it. Sensible objects, however, touch us more directly and move us more forcibly than those which are spiritual, without, for all that, being necessarily preferred ; just as we feel more liking for a present object which strikes the senses—a beautiful garment or an agreeable dish, for example—and nevertheless prefer to those things which we consider of little value others for which we do not feel such a lively emotion—*i.e.*, the money that we should have to spend in order to procure them.

The love which God must necessarily require of His creatures is, therefore, a love of preference, and this essential charity will not be destroyed by other more violent affections, provided that these leave the first place to God. It will only be destroyed by mortal sin.

299. People ask, sometimes, how venial sin can exist together with this virtue of charity which must give God the first place in everything. Does he who commits a venial fault really love God above all ? For instance, when a vain person voluntarily and deliberately gives way to his failing, does he not prefer the satisfaction of his vanity to God ? No ; he indeed refuses an act of renunciation to God, but he only yields to his passion because he knows quite well that he can still remain the friend of God. His disposition with regard to God continues such that if he saw in this culpable action a cause of rupture with Him he would immediately sacrifice his vanity. Therefore he prefers God to this vanity, and that is why he only commits a venial sin (*cf.* St. Thomas, I, II^æ, q. 88, art. 1, ad 2 et 3 ; Billuart, *De Peccatis*, Diss. viii., Art. iv., § 2).

It is just the same, and more obviously so, if it is a question of an imperfection. Such an act of self-denial, for example, as to choose some food which pleases me less, and leave that which I prefer, would be more pleasing to

God, but God does not impose it upon me. He leaves me free, and I make use of my liberty. If God commanded me under pain of venial sin, I would obey immediately ; but He does not do so. Besides, the action is good and legitimate, since the end, which is to take nourishment, is good. True, there is an imperfection in performing a less good action when we see clearly that we might accomplish a better. But that is evidently not preferring the creature to God.

300. Now, what motive will he be obeying who prefers God to all things, who would not for the world cut himself adrift from Him by mortal sin ? It may be a motive of fear, to avoid hell ; it may be a motive of hope, to obtain the beatific vision and enjoy the possession of God for all eternity (*amor concupiscentiae*) ; it may be one of gratitude for all God's benefits ; or, finally, one of love because of His infinite worthiness of love, and without any reference to self. This last motive constitutes perfect charity (*formaliter perfecta*).

301. These points understood, it will be easy to show upon what the value of the act of charity depends. This act is, in fact, more or less meritorious and perfect according to its extent, its intensity, and its motive.

First, according to its extent. The act of charity necessarily excludes all mortal sin, but the act will be more perfect if it goes to the length of rejecting all venial sin. It will be more perfect still (*actus charitatis extensive perfectæ*) if, casting aside every imperfection, it implies the resolution to do always and in all things that which is most pleasing to God.

In the second place, the value of charity is measured by its intensity and solidity. We join the two things, the second quality being the sign of the first. One person may wish to give up every venial sin, and even every imperfection, but with an inconstant and weak, although sincere, will ; whilst in another the same resolution will be firmer and more energetic. Later on the act of love will

be more perfect. The charity (*intensiva perfecta*) which excludes every failing is only possible in heaven.

Finally, the value of the act of love towards God varies according to the perfection of the motive which inspires it. It is clear that the motive of fear is inferior to that of hope or gratitude, while that of the Divine perfections and fitness to be loved is the purest of all.

302. These different motives can coexist simultaneously in the same soul and in the same act, but they are none the less very different. The motive proceeding from the Divine perfections must always be joined to others, for we must always place God above all else—as an intellectual principle, at any rate—and that sovereign love of God brings with it necessarily the beginnings of a love for God for Himself. We say the beginnings, for whilst loving God because of His perfections the will may not be entirely determined to prefer Him to all else; for this it may need the influence of lower motives, such as fear and gratitude.

But if these different motives produce acts complete *in genere suo*—that is to say, not a fancy, an impotent desire, but a real determination to avoid mortal sin—the merit of the one is not altered by the presence of the other. If the act of perfect charity exists even in its lowest degree, *in infimo gradu*, as the theologians have it—that is to say, if the love of God founded upon His infinite perfection, weak though its influence may be, acts nevertheless with sufficient strength upon the will to determine it to avoid mortal sin, the soul is immediately justified. Further, other less perfect considerations, such as the desire for the beatific vision, the fear of the Divine judgments, or feelings of gratitude for God's benefits, which on their side tend to the same determination, in no way detract from the merit of charity. They do not at all prevent, for example, the effects of perfect contrition which is the reconciliation of the sinner with God.

303. Having accepted these principles, it is easy to

apply them to the different classes of Christians whom we have already specified. The act of charity or of perfect contrition derived from the goodness of God in Himself, an act which is not so rare as some people seem to believe, is nevertheless scarcely ever encountered at the beginning of the spiritual life. Beginners who are only partially detached from self and only slightly affected by the Divine perfections are, as a rule, established in a sincere resolution to avoid mortal sin by less disinterested motives. The fear of God especially has a great part in this determination to prefer this friendship before all things. It is true that these supernatural but less noble motives—fear, hope, gratitude—may be useful as rungs of a ladder on which to rise to a more perfect love. In fact, when the will is already established in well-doing, when it has no temptations, or for well-weighed reasons of a personal advantage has sincerely renounced every gravely unlawful act, it becomes easy to it to reject with an equal sincerity these same bad actions as being displeasing to God, the sovereign Good, and so attrition may lead to contrition, and the love of concupiscence or gratitude to charity (*cf. Sum. Theol.*, II, II^{ae}, q. 26, art. 3). But this is not very common with those who still remain in the purgative life, because they are not disposed towards this sort of consideration. Their thoughts do not turn sufficiently often upon supernatural things to allow of this act of true charity being frequently renewed. Besides, it is not very intense, and often does not go as far as hatred of all venial faults. As for imperfections, as a rule they pay no heed to them.

304. Among other less perfect acts of love, pious Christians produce many acts of true charity. Even the remembrance of God's benefits, although directly engendering acts of gratitude, may lead to the exercise of pure charity, for, whilst it represents His infinite goodness to them, it makes them more and more attentive to His perfections. And further, they have such a lively horror of mortal sin (and those even who sometimes succumb to it

through impulse, as it were by assault, are immediately profoundly repentant), that the justifying act of charity or perfect contrition springs quite spontaneously from their hearts, provided that they are ever on their guard against that discouragement into which the devil always strives to cast them. But these acts of charity are not very intense: sufficiently firm with regard to the avoidance of mortal sin, they are much less so with all that concerns the renunciation of venial sins, and especially imperfections; for the simply pious Christians scarcely trouble themselves about imperfections.

305. In fervent Christians the acts of pure charity have become more frequent, and are much more perfect under all circumstances. Their faith being more lively, their intelligence more enlightened, they comprehend better, and delight more in the beauty, the grandeur, and the holiness of God (*amor complacentiae*). Their renunciation, too, being more complete, it costs them nothing to eschew mortal sin, and they even go much further. When they make protestation of their love for God, which they do frequently, more or less explicitly, they renounce not only grave faults, but also those which are venial, and imperfections. Finally, the value of their charity is again enhanced by the fact that their desire to please God and to see Him glorified (*amor benevolentiae*) is more active, their hatred of mortal sin more powerful and stronger than in less perfect Christians, and their resolution of avoiding slight faults and imperfections is at least sincere, if not very firm. So, from the triple point of view of the motive, extent, and intensity of their acts of love, their merit is superior to that of pious souls. We say that it is also much greater by reason of the frequency of these acts of Divine love. In fact, the hearts of these Christians are lifted up to God habitually; it may be either in affective acts which they direct towards Him, the object of their love; or, again, in the actual works which they accomplish, the duties they fulfil, which are offered to God and

performed with a loving submission to His will ; the patience with which they endure trials here below, and the victories which they win whilst striving against temptations. All these are true acts of charity. The love of God is not an incident in, but the very foundation of, their lives, for they are animated by a continual desire to refer everything to God. "Night and day," says Suzo of the inhabitants of the fourth rock, "they strive with great solicitude to overcome their nature and to conquer themselves."

All this, doubtless, does not proceed from charity alone. Gratitude towards God, carefulness as to the interests of their souls, and the increasing of their eternal merits, are largely responsible for the holy stamp which they impress upon their entire lives, and these are very legitimate motives, inspired by faith, and consequently supernatural and meritorious. It is no less true that acts of disinterested charity, complacency, or good-will are not rare in them, and that their love is truly fervent.

§ 3. Other Virtues of Fervent Souls.

306. From this fervour of love naturally spring other virtues, which beginners and even pious souls do not possess to the same degree. First of all, a great confidence in God. How could the fervent heart be other than full of confidence, when it feels that it loves God and understands that it is loved by Him ? "After interior sweetness and dilation the soul is no longer as restrained as before in God's service, but possesses much more liberty of spirit. It is less distressed by the fear of hell, for though more anxious than ever not to offend God, it has lost servile fear, and feels sure that one day it will possess its Lord" (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. iii., § 8).

Its confidence goes further still. Relying upon God's assistance, it believes itself capable, by the help of grace, of the most difficult works that He may require. St. Teresa, who wrote especially for Carmelites, who are called by

vocation to the practice of austerities, notices here the eagerness of the soul for penance. The Saint had shown in the preceding mansion the fearful soul, not daring to mortify itself lest it should injure its health. She had good-naturedly ridiculed this extreme discretion which persons who are neither very courageous or loving bring into the practice of penance. Henceforth, " free from the former apprehension of injuring its health by austerities, the soul believes that there are none which it cannot practise with God's help, and so desires to perform still greater penances " (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. iii., § 8).

307. One of the clearest marks distinguishing the fervent soul from the simply pious is patience, which is greatly strengthened in the first named. " Greater indifference is felt for sufferings, because, faith being stronger, it trusts that if borne for God He will give the grace to endure them patiently. Indeed, such a one even longs for trials at times, having a most ardent desire to do something for His sake " (St. Teresa, *loc. cit.*).

Pious souls, however, understand the necessity of accepting the contradictions of life, and strive to do so, but how many failures there are ! They are never satisfied with the crosses that God sends them ; they think and they declare that they would be ready to suffer anything else, but not that which comes to them. Fervent souls leave it to God, in His wisdom, to choose the trials that He thinks the most useful for their advancement. They do not presume to remonstrate with so good a God, and, like well-behaved children, who accept equally from their mother bitter remedies and sweet cakes, they are submissive to the Divine will, whether it brings them consolations or trials.

" And what is best in all this is that the troubles, humiliations, and other spiritual evils which formerly tended solely in the direction of alienating the soul from God, filling it with self, maintaining it in a kind of incapacity and inaptitude for devoting itself to God and Divine things, these

now have a contrary effect. The more violent the troubles and tribulations, the more closely is the soul united to God, and the more also does it apply itself vigorously to the Divine works that it has in hand ; so the direct result of these troubles is to unite the soul to God " (Libermann, *Letter to the Director of a Seminary*, April 28, 1839).

308. It goes without saying that the other virtues have progressed in like manner : its humility is more profound. " As the soul better understands the Divine majesty, it realizes more vividly its own baseness " (St. Teresa, *loc. cit.*).

Its detachment from the world is more complete. " Divine consolations show it how vile are earthly pleasures ; gradually withdrawing itself from them, it gains more mastery over itself " (*ibid.*).

If it strives to procure the good of its neighbours, it is rather by a sentiment of Christian charity than by a natural movement of sympathy or compassion, so it desires much more the spiritual welfare of those it loves than their temporal satisfaction.

If, then, we see it condescending, affectionate, maternal, forgetful of self with those who suffer, let us take care not to attribute this devotion to natural sympathy or to the pity which the sight of human suffering gives birth to in well-disposed hearts. The fervent soul has more exalted views ; it knows for what end God permits suffering, and whilst alleviating the pain, it wishes to assist its neighbour to obtain profit therefrom. It suffers, indeed, when it sees those whom it loves suffering ; but this natural and very legitimate compassion is dominated by the considerations of faith which guide it in its whole conduct.

309. All these acts of faith, submission to the will of God, of detachment, charity, etc., are generally much swifter than in the case of pious souls. It is no longer by force of reasoning that we accept the troubles of life or fulfil life's duties ; at the very first glance the soul, full of faith, recognizes the Divine will, and understands the

obligation to adhere to it. Besides, its will is established in God. Freed—at least, to a great extent—from that multitude of natural affections and self-seekings which curtail the liberty of the pious soul, it goes directly to God, and acts unhesitatingly with justice and purity of intention (*cf.* Libermann, *Letter to the Director of a Seminary*, April 28, 1839).

310. So disposed, these souls commit comparatively few sins. We must not blindly credit the self-accusations of penitents themselves on this point. Some accuse themselves of everything bad which they feel in themselves; others, who are not on that account more perfect, but who are entirely convinced that only that which has the consent of the will is culpable, do not mention the many evil inclinations of which they are conscious, but to which they do not yield, or where consent is so slight that their own culpability escapes them. “Do not trouble,” wrote St. Francis of Sales to Madame de la Valbonne, “because you do not perceive all your little falls in order to confess them. No, my child, for as you often fall without noticing it, so you often arise again unconsciously” (*Letter*, May 15, 1627).

When a soul, backward in other respects, finds only few or no sins to confess, we must conclude that it is not very clear-sighted, and has an imperfect knowledge of itself. If, on the other hand, that soul has all the signs of fervour, we must not disturb it by reproaching it for its blindness, since we plainly see that a too high opinion of itself does not result.

311. Further, let us remark, as being to the credit of fervent Christians, that, as a consequence of being more detached from self, they have acquired, all other things being equal, a much surer and juster judgment. Granted equality of intelligence, therefore, an imperfect Christian over-enamoured of his own ideas and too much attached, in particular, to his own will, who cannot bear to be contradicted and flouted, is often unconsciously unjust towards

those whose actions interfere with his plans. The fervent Christian, more practised in renunciation, more emancipated from all personal interests, is for that very reason more impartial in his judgments, and less liable to err.

§ 4. *The Imperfections of Fervent Souls.*

312. After this picture we may perhaps be tempted to say, like Blessed Suzo, when God had shown him the inhabitants of the fourth rock, and described their interior dispositions, "Lord, they must be dear to Thee, for they are perfect." And, indeed, worldly people, when well disposed—for we must always make allowance for human malice—rightly admire the exemplary sentiments and conduct to which they themselves are such strangers. They are astonished at them, and are quickly inclined to canonize these fervent souls.

Such, however, is not the verdict of the Saints. "They are dear to Me," our Lord replies to Suzo, "but they are not yet perfect. . . . The devil deceives them by his wiles. . . . They fall into his snares through performing their actions with complacency and self-will. . . . Although they are far advanced in My grace and friendship, the lack of detachment from their own will deprives them of those particular and secret favours which I grant to My well-beloved; and because of that imperfection which is in them they will have to be purified in the flames of purgatory, and will have a lower place in heaven than My intimate friends."

St. Teresa urges "those who have reached this state to avoid most carefully all occasions of offending God. The soul is not yet fully established in virtue, but is like a new-born babe first feeding at his mother's breast : if it leaves her, what can it do but die ?" (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. iii., § 9).

313. So, although the excellent dispositions that we have described have become the ordinary dispositions of

these persons, some failings are still to be met with in them ; they are more ardent than firm. They have, indeed, a sincere desire to renounce themselves at all times and in all things, and they accomplish frequent and generous acts of self-denial ; but, nevertheless, they are still far from absolute renunciation ; they have grand views of perfection rather than perfection really acquired.

Experiencing within themselves lively sentiments of the love of God, ardent desires of consecrating their whole life to Him, they are inclined to deceive themselves, and to think that there is no longer any room in them for self-love. " You tell me," St. Francis of Sales wrote to a lady, " that in whatever surroundings God places you it is all the same to you. But, come ! you know quite well in what surroundings He has placed you, and is it all the same to you ? Neither are you ignorant that He wishes you to pay this daily debt concerning which you write, and, nevertheless, that is not all the same to you. . . . Mother Teresa, whom you love so much (of which I am glad), says somewhere that we often say such things by force of habit and lightly, thinking that we say them from the bottom of our hearts, although it is nothing of the sort, as we find out afterwards in practice " (ed. *Briday*, vol. vi., p. 382).

Again, we see that their renunciation is far from having attained the degree to which they aspire, in that certain entirely natural preoccupations which they wish to get rid of, remain and pursue and harass them ; we see it, also, in their still paying too much attention to vain tittle-tattle on current topics, worldly news, political or otherwise. As they have not yet experienced those severe trials which cut off all attachments and give true abnegation to the soul, they are still too fond of many things upon earth ; we see them taking pleasure in earthly satisfactions and delights, although moderately and, as a rule, without offending God.

They would like, as we have said, to mortify themselves

in all things ; but often when nature finds some satisfaction without having sought for it, they rest in it, they accept the pleasure, telling themselves all the time that it would be much better to give it up : but their courage is not equal to the enlightenment of their faith. If the satisfaction that is enjoyed is taken away, the fervent soul willingly and immediately submits, for it knows the value of crosses, and it is glad to have this sacrifice to offer to God ; but let it not on that account flatter itself that it has attained perfect abnegation. Soon, alas ! other occasions will present themselves in which it will have a fresh proof of its weakness. How many times will it be able to say again : *Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* (I see the good, I approve it, and I do the evil) ! So, to give a sufficiently common example, these persons will have formed the purpose of beginning the day by a little sacrifice which, although it appears quite trivial, costs nature something—getting out of bed as soon as they are called without delay ; and then, when the time comes, there they lie on ! Others resolve to make their meals an occasion of mortification, and then yield to sensuality, etc. The resolutions are sincere, but they fail at the moment of execution.

Without the stubbornness and obstinacy which many pious souls show, there are still numerous circumstances in which they hold, more or less consciously, to their own will, and when the little events of life do not fall out according to their taste, they only half resign themselves, and retain a secret feeling of discontent at the bottom of their hearts. Then, again, far more than they are aware of, a natural eagerness mingles even in their good desires ; human sentiments enter into their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears.

315. In the acts of renunciation which they make so often and sincerely, some desire of greatness remains, some wish to rise higher, but solely in spiritual things. They are too much enlightened not to disdain worldly

honours, to seek eagerly after those little human successes in which the vanity of imperfect souls takes delight, but they have not an equal disinterestedness with regard to spiritual advantages. So they make occasions for self-appreciation even from the crosses which Providence sends them (*cf.* Libermann, *Letter* 113, July 8, 1838, and *Letter* 191). Frequently, besides, they exaggerate their troubles, and easily persuade themselves that few souls have trials as severe as theirs. Hence it follows that they do not always rejoice at the good done by others, as we should have the right to expect. "It is for this reason" (because self-love is not dead) "that we have not the satisfaction that we ought to have in seeing others do well; for what we do not see in ourselves seems of slight value to us, and what we do see in ourselves appears exceedingly admirable, because we love ourselves so tenderly" (St. Francis of Sales, *Letter to a Religious*, written in 1615). Do we not find very good persons judging their own deeds favourably, and those of others severely?

316. We said that fervent souls generally have great confidence in God. In many, combined with this sentiment, there is a self-assurance which is not free from rashness; in others, on the contrary, this confidence leaves much to be desired. It may be that they count too much upon human means, or do not rely sufficiently upon the boundless, the fatherly, providence of God. There is a remnant of human feeling, of worldly prudence which we do not find in the true friends of God.

317. The reader will remember the description given above (No. 241) of undue eagerness. Now, among those of whom we speak, who, though advanced in piety, have not attained perfection, a great number are very subject to this failing.¹

¹ "The third kind of precipitation is met with in those who are really good, and truly mortified as to the malice, although not at all so with regard to the activity, of their nature. They act from virtue, and do not appear to have any faults, but, because of this activity,

Others, again, despite their sincere desire for absolute perfection, still have a great fund of softness and faint-heartedness. In both we remark very noticeable alternations, ups and downs—times of fervour and then of half-heartedness. When a soul which has emerged from the period of sensible graces remains without any fluctuations in its ardent and generous dispositions, it has then attained to the state of perfection.

318. In short, fervent souls are superior to pious souls, who, “although firmly resolved to love God, are, nevertheless, still novices, tender and weak apprentices. They indeed love the Divine sweetness, but with an intermingling of other affections ; their sacred love being still in its infancy, they love many superfluous, vain, and dangerous objects, together with our Lord.”

Fervent souls “have cut off all love for harmful things, and yet they are not without dangerous and superfluous affections, for they love those things which God wishes them to love, but with excess and a love which is over-tender and passionate. . . . These souls, then, indeed love too ardently and with superfluity, but they do not love superfluities, but only what is lawfully loved (*Love of God*, Book X., chap. iv.).

nature often takes the initiative in many things, and forestalls the action of grace, hindering perfection and the interior life of Jesus Christ within them, and often even of the Divine life, which meets with opposition, because by this very activity (although in no way evil) they act of themselves when they ought to give place to the Holy Spirit, who would do much more and incomparably better than they. But because the Holy Spirit only enters in when nature is dead, to establish there His sweet and holy life, and because, besides, He is, as it were, timid and gentle, seeing nature pushing itself forward, He draws back and cannot perform the great things which He works in those whom he possesses wholly ; and this sometimes happens solely by the obstacle of that activity which always originates in some self-love” (*Surin., Catech.*, vol. ii., part i., chap. v.).

CHAPTER II

THE PROGRESS OF THE FERVENT SOUL

§ I. How the Soul attains to the State of Fervour.

319. FERVENT souls, therefore, are those who have a sincere desire of renouncing themselves in all things, and who really endeavour to arrive at this perfect abnegation, but without having yet attained thereto.

The first souls to conceive this laudable and excellent desire are those who have been favoured with very abundant, sensible graces. Through the channel of their affective prayers, which were so sweet and so resolute, and in which a mingling of their first contemplative favours soon appeared, they have received much light. God, Who wishes to lead them to perfection, has shown them all its extent and its advantages. The impressions of grace, as we have already remarked, are stronger and more abundant in those souls who lead a recollected and mortified life. Even in them, however, sensible favours will not produce all their effects at once. At first they will not face this incessant renunciation as the goal of their efforts. Little by little the light grows within them. One person will make a beginning with a lively sorrow for his sins ; he will feel heartbroken for having offended God. If, under the impression of this sentiment, he shows himself more and more faithful in recollection and mortification, it will grow stronger, pursuing him into his work, inspiring in him an ever more and more ardent love for God, and leading him insensibly by way of repentance to a desire for complete renunciation. Others arrive at this desire by the consideration of the Cross and the sufferings of our Lord. If the soul which feels moved by the thought of this mystery preserves a continual remembrance thereof within itself, if it can put aside the distractions and pre-occupations which weaken its impression, if it strives to give back to Jesus Crucified devotion for devotion, sacrifice

for sacrifice, it will soon feel inflamed with love for the Cross and a desire to suffer for our Lord, and to immolate itself wholly for Him.

This latter way is the shortest and most effectual ; it is the quickest road to contemplation and fervour (*cf.* Ven. Fr. Libermann, *Writings*, p. 165). Many reach the same result by way of other considerations ; for in the greatest number of cases not one consideration only, but the combined result of all the lights received in prayer and moments of recollection, will enlighten them, little by little, upon the necessity of dying to themselves, and will inspire them with a sincere desire of living henceforth for God alone.

321. Those who pray less will obviously receive less help from this holy exercise. They may, however, arrive at dispositions equivalent to those of which we have just spoken, by a less direct and easy route—namely, by a certain fidelity to the duties of their state and the generous acceptance of the sacrifices which these duties impose upon them. If they thus habituate themselves to act, not from self-love, but purely from obedience to God, and this even when they are deprived of those spiritual delights which are such a source of strength to pious souls ; if they are constantly forgetful of self in order that they may devote themselves better to God's service and that of their neighbour, they are confirmed in the practice of renunciation, and their actions become highly meritorious.

There are others, especially amongst those that live in the world, who devote themselves still less to prayer, properly so called, but to whom Providence sends severe and repeated trials ; their life is one continual succession of bitternesses, deceptions, contradictions, and worries. Everything is profitable to generous hearts, and these, by their submission, their confidence in God—a confidence which these tempests leave unshaken—by their prayers, which become more frequent as their trials increase—their recourse to God being then, so to speak, continuous—rise to a high degree of love, and are truly fervent.

322. Finally, God leads pious but imperfect souls to this disposition of fervour by allowing them to be assailed by violent temptations, against which they strive valiantly, and which oblige them to strip themselves of self.

"I have seen," says the Ven. Father Libermann, "many young people in a more or less serious crisis ; it is a state of trial through which God makes many souls pass when He wishes to employ them in His service, in order to consolidate them and attach them unchangeably to Him. Well, not even one of those whom the temptation attacked upon several points at once, instead of concentrating itself upon one of the more dangerous passions—not one abandoned the service of God, and all derived considerable benefit from the temptation. Amongst that smaller number which I have seen in whom the temptation was concentrated and focussed upon one important passion, I can only at this moment recollect one who fell from the grace of God, and failed in his vocation. So true it is that these trials are generally and almost universally given for the sanctification of souls" (*Letter of June 16, 1850*, quoted by Cardinal Pitra, *Vie du Ven. Libermann*).

It is true that the counsels and prayers of a director like this must have powerfully assisted these souls in continuing in the right way.

"Once," the Ven. Father says again, "I saw evidences of pride with regard to such a trial. I own that I felt extreme anxiety, because then I had not enough experience in the things of God. That was fifteen to eighteen years ago. He who was thus tried became an excellent priest, who perseveres in piety and fervour, and who has even attained to great humility, although he has always been placed in circumstances which favour pride" (*Letter of May 4, 1851*, quoted by Cardinal Pitra, *Vie du Ven. Libermann*).

323. Such, in fact, are the ways by which God leads a soul to the desire of giving itself up entirely to Him, and, having conducted it so far, He strengthens it in these ex-

cellent dispositions : ardent affective prayer, the generous fulfilment of unpleasant duties, tribulations and temptations. These different means are usually associated with, and mutually support, each other ; or, again, they may operate alternately, and, acting successively in the same direction, they are a source of rapid progress to faithful souls, as we shall now endeavour to show.

§ 2. How Souls gain Strength in Renunciation—The Two Phases of Fervour : Sensible Fervour, Acquired Fervour —The Night of the Senses—Pure Faith.

324. May we be allowed to retrace our steps for a moment, and recall certain principles which we are about to see in their application ?

When the soul, we have said, yields itself seriously to God's service, bringing a real good-will to bear upon the endeavour, it soon finds itself forcibly urged on to the love of the Christian virtues by the graces that it receives ; and these graces, by their operations upon the senses and the imagination, touch the heart with such strength and sweetness, or they present such obvious reasons, such convincing arguments to the mind, that it cannot, so to speak, rebel against them. After a period of varying duration, there comes about a transformation in these operations of grace : the sensibility grows fainter, the emotions are rarer and less sweet. The motives for engaging in God's service, which formerly made a great impression, no longer have the same powerful effect.

The soul has not yet attained to a state of fervour if it has not conceived the generous resolution of giving up its own will in all things, of dying wholly to itself ; it remains, as it were, rooted in the state of simple piety, such as we have described ; deprived—at least, in part—of the sensible graces which formerly sustained it, its progress is then either completely arrested, or at least retarded.¹

¹ But one means of rising higher still remains. It may live in a state of recollection, and apply itself whole-heartedly to mortifica-

325. But it often happens that when this transformation takes place the soul has already entered into fervour and the desire for perfect renunciation. In this case the crisis serves to strengthen it. To the violent affective sentiments a calmer disposition succeeds ; it has more solidity and no less energy. Fervour of will takes the place of sensible fervour, and contemplation, which has hitherto appeared at intervals only, may now become more frequent.

In some cases this transformation is scarcely noticeable ; so resignedly do they accept the withdrawal of the sensible delights, so submissive are they to the Divine Will, that they never dream of complaining. Moreover, God may spare them the more distressing elements in this trial. Usually, however, the crisis is fraught with suffering. "When the Lord," says St. John of the Cross, "deprives these souls of sensible sweetneses, He casts them into aridities and intense darkness, in order that He may deliver them from all their imperfections and childish fancies, and that they may acquire virtue by quite another manner.

"God thus leaves them in darkness so great that they know not whither to betake themselves with their imaginations and reflections of sense. They cannot now advance a single step in meditation, the inward sense being overwhelmed in this night, and abandoned to dryness so great that they have no more any joy or sweetness in their spiritual exercises, as they had before ; and in their place they find nothing but insipidity and bitterness. For, as I said before, God now, looking upon them as somewhat grown in grace, weans them from the breasts that they may become strong and cast their swaddling-clothes aside ; He carries them in His arms no longer, and shows them how

tion (*vide supra*, Nos. 196, 204). For mortification, by drawing more graces down upon it, will finally bring it to the comprehension of the value of perfect abnegation, and it will strive earnestly to attain it. Or Providence may also ordain for it severe trials, and these, when courageously borne, will give it a new impetus towards the perfect life.

to walk alone. All this is strange to them, for all things seem to go against them" (*Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. viii.).

This crisis, this *night of the senses*, as St. John of the Cross calls it, is frequently rendered more painful still, because not only must the soul detach itself from the sensible sweet-senses which are so dear to it, but it must also come to a more correct knowledge of itself, and for this it is essential that it should undergo the most painful interior humiliations.

"The great secret of God's conduct with regard to a soul which He desires to sanctify," says Father Grou, "is to take from it every kind of confidence in itself, and to abandon it to its misery. To this end, He has only to withdraw His sensible grace, to leave the soul to itself, to expose it to the lightest temptation. Soon it begins to feel distaste and repugnance; it sees obstacles and difficulties everywhere; it succumbs on the least occasions; a look, a gesture, a word, disconcert it—this same soul which considered itself impervious to the greatest dangers. It flies to the opposite extremity; it is afraid of everything; it is discouraged, thinks that it will never be able to conquer itself in anything; it is tempted to give up everything. And, indeed, it would do so if God did not quickly come to the rescue.

"God continues these dealings with the soul until by repeated experiences He has quite convinced it of its nothingness, of its incapacity for all good, and of the necessity of resting only upon Him. This is the purpose of the temptations to which it sees itself ready to succumb a hundred times, and in which God upholds it when all hope seems to be lost; the revolt of passions which it thought to be extinct, and which now reassert their sway with such violence that the reason is obscured and the soul stands within a hair's-breadth of destruction; faults of weakness of every kind into which God purposely allows the soul to fall in order to humble it; disgusts, strange difficulties in the practice of the virtues, great repugnance to prayer,

and the other exercises of piety ; in a word, the profound and lively consciousness of the malignity of nature, and its hatred for everything good. God employs all these means in order to annihilate the soul in its own eyes, to fill it with hatred and horror of itself, to convince it that there is no crime, however terrible, of which it is not capable—not the least good action, not the least effort, not the least desire, nor the least good thought, which it is able to produce of itself" (*Manual of Interior Souls*, p. 89).

Sometimes it even happens that the soul "is assailed by the spirit of blasphemy ; through all its thoughts pass frightful blasphemies, which are suggested to the imagination with such violence that it seems sometimes as if the mouth actually uttered them, which is an unspeakable torment" (*Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. xiv.).

327. Those who undergo these intense temptations are amazed at them, and are sometimes absolutely disconcerted. They would be less surprised if they understood that the temptation is very often as much a punishment as a trial. *Per quæ quis peccat, per hæc et torquetur*—Wisd. xi. 17 (By what things a man sinneth, by the same also is he tormented). You groan at the assaults to which the demon of anger, of jealousy and hatred, subjects you, but have you not exposed yourself to his attacks by neglecting the practice of humility, gentleness, fraternal charity ? Have you not increased the tempter's power by yielding more than once to his suggestions ? *Each victory that you gain augments your strength*, for it wins you more powerful graces : it weakens your bad inclinations, and strengthens your will ; *but each of your failures gives your enemy an advantage over you*. An army besieging a strong fortress becomes more formidable with each redoubt that it captures, each fort that it gains, and the besieged have more trouble in keeping the enemy at bay, until, at the cost of terrible sacrifices, they have reconquered all their lost ground.

Temptations, to faithful souls, should be a lesson teaching them with how much care they should watch over

themselves, and avoid the occasions of sin. They are also an opportunity for expiation, a facility offered to souls by the mercy of God for the payment of the debt owing to His infinite justice ; and by that very fact it is an efficacious means of purification. It is as our Father that God punishes us, and whoever is willing to profit by the chastisement must become better and more holy.

Temptations and the revolts of nature, troubles and tribulations, do not, however, constitute the purification of the senses ; they are rather the accessory circumstances which usually accompany it and render it more complete.

328. Considered by itself, purification, *the night of the senses*, consists of a continuous succession of aridities which deprive the soul, through no fault of its own, of the consolations which it formerly experienced, render the exercise of meditation very difficult, or practically impossible, and even cause it to feel a profound distaste for the things of this world. We say "through no fault of its own," because it may be that dryness is caused by wrong-doing, by slackness in God's service, by unregulated attachments wilfully entertained, which arrest every impulse towards good. If such were the cause, the aridity could be cured by returning generously to the practice of the Christian virtues, especially recollection and mortification. But if dryness is not brought about by any such cause, if it does not prevent frequent thoughts of God, and a sincere and constant desire of remaining faithful to Him in all things ; if it is accompanied by a lively anxiety arising from the fact that we cannot serve God and love Him as we would wish we must only see in this aridity and powerlessness an entirely providential trial.

It is indeed the action of God ; He wishes to strengthen the soul, to raise it above the sensible faculties, and oblige it to enter into what has been called *pure* or *naked faith*. Grace then takes a new form ; it no longer directly affects the inferior part of the soul, where the sensible faculties are—not even the superior part in which the reason holds its sway, but the supreme part in which these intuitions of

the intellect are effected, where truth is perceived at a glance, and there is no need for long-drawn-out arguments. *Then, in the absence of sensible consolations, and long arguments having become wearisome, faith alone operates ; the mere recollection of the truths which it teaches sustains the soul, enlightens it, and directs its conduct.* The soul believes in the goodness and the love of God no longer because it has the proofs before its eyes, or because of the intimate consolations, sweet and powerful operations of grace, which reveal to it this goodness and love, but solely because God has declared it. Prayer becomes painful to it, but it perseveres therein in order that it may remain faithful to God. Apart from prayer, its condition does not change ; in all that it does it relies upon pure faith, and acts by the will alone, without reasoning and without enjoyment, so soon as the duty is clear, and this even in unpremeditated actions which are not facilitated by previously acquired habits.¹

As soon as a soul has begun seriously to lead this life of pure faith, if it has not attained the supreme heights of virtue, it has at least entered into what we have called the fervour of the will, which succeeds to sensible fervour.

329. We must not thence conclude that Christians who have acquired this spiritual fervour will have emerged completely from the sensible way. They will still from time to time feel those sweet and powerful emotions which we described at the beginning of Book III.; striking considerations will present themselves to their minds ; certain books will affect them warmly ; or, again, ceremonies at which they assist will impress them beneficially ; sometimes their pious exercises—prayer, Holy Communion—will afford them sweet consolations ; God will thus occasionally reanimate their good dispositions by means of these sensible graces. But these

¹ It is true that in less advanced Christians (third degree) we meet with these rapid acts of renunciation, victories over nature won without a struggle, even with regard to good works which might be omitted without sin, but in these cases this prompt renunciation is explained either by the assistance of sensible graces or by acquired *habits*.

consolations are not by any means so continuous as they were at the beginning, and this it is which partially explains the alternations which we notice in their piety. Thus, a few days' retreat will rekindle their ardour, while, on the other hand, the absence of spiritual help will be very injurious to them.

Meanwhile the truth of what we have said remains. Over and above their sensible fervour these souls retain an acquired fervour, as it were, which resides in the will, and enables them to practise acts of abnegation without any inclination or attraction.

§ 3. *How and why Many Souls never rise Higher in the Spiritual Life.*

330. Is this state perfection, then? No; for alongside of these acts of generous abnegation (which to our mind rise beyond the level of simple piety) those imperfect attachments of which we have spoken above still endure. The purification of the senses, properly sustained, should indeed sever all these ties, and bring the soul to the unitive life. Those whom God wills to lead thither, and who are faithful to grace, truly attain thereto; but many only partially break away from their attachments, and these continue in a higher degree than ordinary piety, but without arriving at the state of the perfect.

Let us hear St. John of the Cross:

“ How long the soul will continue in this fast and penance of sense cannot with certainty be told, because it is not the same in all, neither are all subjected to the same temptations. These trials are measured by the Divine will, and are proportioned to the imperfections, many or few, to be purged away, and also to the degree of union in love to which God intends to raise the soul; that is the measure of its humiliations, both in their intensity and duration.

“ Those who are strong and more able to bear suffering are purified in more intense trials and in less time. *But*

those who are weak are purified very slowly with weak temptations, and the night of their purgation is long ; their senses are refreshed from time to time, lest they should fall away ; these, however, come late to the pureness of their perfection in this life, and some of them never. These persons are not clearly in the purgative night, nor clearly out of it ; for though they make no progress, yet, in order that they may be humble and know themselves, God tries them for a season in aridities and temptations, and visits them with His consolations at intervals, lest they should become faint-hearted, and seek for comfort in the ways of the world.

“ From other souls, still weaker, God, as it were, hides Himself, that He may try them in His love ; for without this hiding of His face from them they would never learn how to approach Him. But those souls that are to enter so blessed and high a state as this of the union of love, however quickly God may lead them, tarry long, in general, amidst aridities, as we see by experience ” (*Obscure Night*, Book I., chap. xiv.).

331. It may also be that souls should be partially emancipated from sensible fervours, and taste of contemplation from time to time, without having passed through any very dolorous crisis. The purification of the senses is then begun, but awaits completion. They are, and they may continue for years together, or even during their whole lives, in an intermediary state, where the two ways meet and the soul begins to issue forth from the illuminative life without having entered completely into the unitive life. According to the saintly writer, it is the weak and languid souls especially who remain in this half-way condition. They fail to rise to the life of constant and intimate union with God, because they do not carry the spirit of self-sacrifice and forgetfulness of self far enough.

332. The souls lacking in generosity are those who readily listen to the objections which nature opposes to the inspirations of grace and the counsels of their director. In order to justify their resistance, they instance the large

number of sacrifices which they have already made, the victories they have won, the acts of virtue accomplished. They continue to desire perfection, and yet they will not understand the length to which they must go in the path of self-sacrifice if they would attain to it. "Others," they say, "do not do as much; less is demanded of them, or else they find things easier, they have more help. In my case, on the contrary, the difficulties are much greater; they are really insurmountable." This obliquity of judgment, which causes them to exaggerate their own difficulties and diminish other people's merits, indicates that the soul is too self-reliant and full of self-love, and this is the more serious because it does not recognize the fact, and neglects to combat it. With this disposition, these souls not only do not advance, but they even fall back, and fail to maintain themselves in the state of fervour.

Another disposition of mind which sometimes checks the fervent souls is a tendency to form unfavourable estimates, and to take in bad part all their neighbours' actions. Fraternal charity is thereby wounded and graces are diminished. These persons particularly criticize anything which does not exactly please them. If some one asks a service of them, they find him deficient in delicacy and unmortified. Those who contradict them are lacking in judgment in their eyes, as are those who thwart them in virtue. These perverse spirits may nevertheless have fine qualities and solid virtues; under certain circumstances they may even give proof of a sincere devotion; but they make their brethren suffer, and fall into dispositions of bitterness and impatience which spoil their acts of love and retard their progress. If they would carry their abnegation and forgetfulness of self further, they would not remain rooted in this degree, and would rise higher on the ladder of perfection. Feirvent souls also frequently fail to become more perfect because they expend nearly all their activity upon external works at the expense of the inner life. They curtail the time allotted to devotional exercises more than

they should do, and allow themselves to be dominated by cares and material preoccupations, instead of applying themselves to nourish their faith and love. Or, again, they show a too natural attachment to their works and occupations. Then, their holy thoughts and ardent desires becoming rarer, they can no longer bring sufficient strength and constancy to bear in their struggle against self. If the virtues which they have acquired, and which they continue to practise,¹ prevent their falling back, nature, insufficiently suppressed, has too much influence not to be an obstacle to any fresh progress.

And the same thing happens, and for the same reason, each time that, under some false pretext, they fail in the generous practice of the fundamental virtues, such as mortification and humility.

To sum up : The fervent soul, while maintaining the good habits which it has contracted, ceases to advance whenever, allowing itself to be blinded by disingenuous reasons, it relaxes its efforts, and lacks the courage to go to any length in self-sacrifice.

333. St. Teresa laments this same fact. "When God gives these precious pledges of His love (the prayer of quietude) to any soul, it is a sign that He destines it to great things, and if it be faithful it will make a wonderful progress in perfection. But if He perceive that, after having placed it in possession of His kingdom, it still turns its thoughts and affections earthwards, God will not reveal to it His secrets and the marvels of His kingdom. Such precious favours will be but seldom granted, and when He deigns so to gratify it, it will be but for a brief space. This, in my opinion, is the reason that amongst the souls arrived at this degree so few are to be found who go further on the spiritual road. Since they do not respond to so great a grace by their fidelity, and because, instead of preparing themselves to receive it anew, they rather cancel their gift, recalling

¹ It is superfluous to say that if they relax the practice of these virtues they will not only be standing still, they will be going back.

their will out of God's hands, when He was already counting it as His own, to attach it to vile things ; so God goes elsewhere in search of other souls who truly love Him, in order to enrich them with still greater treasures, but without always entirely removing from the first souls the things that He had given them, provided that they are living in purity of conscience " (*Way of Perfection*, chap. xxxiii.).

In the fifteenth chapter of her *Life* the Saint says again : " Many are the souls who attain to this state, and few are they who go further ; and I know not who is in fault—most certainly it is not God. . . . It is a great sorrow to me, because, as I said before, I know that many souls come thus far, and that those who go further, as they ought to go, are so few that I am ashamed to say it."

CHAPTER III

THE PRAYER OF FERVENT SOULS

334. FROM all that has gone before it follows that affective prayer¹ is the best adapted to fervent souls. A Christian soul, as we have said, never arrives at these sincere dispositions to give himself wholly to God, and to renounce everything for the love of Him, without having received great illumination. Simple meditation will not have achieved this ; the most striking considerations which it could have evolved, or which might have been suggested to it, do not operate on the spirit with sufficient power unless grace, touching the heart, simultaneously brings about a detachment from creatures by making it taste the Divine sweetness. It is affective prayer, then, and intense affective prayer, which, commonly speaking, leads it to fervour.

¹ The pious soul also has recourse to affective prayer, but when it attains to this degree of intensity described by Father Libermann it is a sure sign that the soul has attained to fervour.

Besides, this degree once attained, and faith being thus illumined, the prayer of meditation will no longer teach it much. What could all the fine arguments in the world add to these already profound convictions ?

It will speak to our Lord then ; it will consider Him in His mysteries ; it will show Him a great confidence and a great love, imploring His blessing, and asking Him more especially that it may love Him more.

Amidst all this, if it maintains itself in a great purity of life, it will receive fresh graces from God, and from time to time will be admitted to the favour of contemplation.

335. But these happy days will not be without interruptions. Many fervent souls, in truth, are to be found whose prayer is difficult and laborious, who no longer taste those joys of a loving intercourse with Jesus, and who often strive unsuccessfully against a host of distractions and aridities. These drynesses may proceed from different causes : (1) These souls, while preserving in the depth of their hearts a great admiration for Christian abnegation, with a certain desire to practise it in all its fullness, *are partially relaxed, and no longer retain their former ardour for mortification.* Also, certain worldly cares, certain preoccupations denoting a heart *insufficiently detached or deficient in faith,* absorb their attention, and make it impossible for them to pray as they once prayed, and as they still desire to do.¹ (2) There are others who do not devote the necessary time and attention to this prayer.² These do not count sufficiently upon God ; they rely too much on themselves, and forget that less of human activity and more prayer would forward their work better, and make their labour more fruitful. Could they not, as a rule, without neglecting any essential duty, but

¹ In this case what we have said above (on affective prayer, Chapter II.) is applicable to them.

² It seems to us that it would be extremely difficult to arrive at contemplation if we were to make a fixed rule, as it were, not to devote more than half an hour daily to the holy occupation of this prayer.

by scrupulously avoiding all waste of time, all less necessary occupations, devote a longer time to this holy exercise?¹ (3) A third cause, to which we shall have occasion to revert presently, is that many souls have not fully entered into the contemplative way, as they were invited to do, and they are vainly demanding the aids to fervour and the methods which are no longer adapted to them. (4) Finally, if none of these reasons apply, if these souls have lost nothing of their first fervour, if they devote sufficient time to prayer, and if they still find great difficulty therein, and if this difficulty continues in spite of all their efforts, we must presume that they are in the night of the senses.

336. St. John of the Cross tells us what it is that is taking place within them. Ripe for a higher way, that of contemplation, they do not at first, except very occasionally, receive those contemplative graces in the intense degree which takes strong hold upon the soul, and which, as we shall presently see, constitutes sensible quietude. This comes to them from time to time in their prayers, but it cannot yet be their habitual condition.² During the intervals the contemplative grace is much weaker—so weak that the soul, to which this kind of operation is new, is hardly conscious of it, and strives to unite itself with God by means of considerations and the pictures of the imagination.

This obscure contemplation, as St. John of the Cross calls

¹ Let those who, consumed by zeal, fancy that by their preachings and other exterior works they are going to change the whole world, reflect a moment, and they will realize how much more pleasing they would be to our Lord, not to mention the good example that they would give, if they would spend half their time communing with God in prayer, even if they were not so advanced as the soul to which we are referring here" (St. John of the Cross, *Spir. Cant.*, str. xxviii.).

² "At first," says St. Teresa (*Sixth Mansion*, chap. vii.), "one or even several years may pass before the Master will accord them any new favours." (She refers to quietude, in which the will is inflamed with love, and the soul feels the Divine presence.) See also *St. Francis of Sales*, whom we shall presently quote, No. 347.

it, is quite powerful enough to impel the soul towards God, and consequently to make it aspire to fervent prayer and an intense affective union. But it cannot produce the vivid sweetness of sensible quietude, and it is precisely because, being thus inclined towards God, it fails to attain to the sensible enjoyment of His presence, that the soul seeks after all kinds of considerations and representations. If it persists obstinately in this course, it will wear itself out in useless efforts, and it will never find the satisfactions and spiritual delights that it desires.

337. Under these circumstances, what should it then do ? While finding itself powerless to meditate, or to find God by way of the imagination, if it will take heed it is aware of a tranquil and secret happiness which it tastes in merely abiding in a state of spiritual repose, standing attentively, as it were, in the presence and loving contemplation of God, without requiring the least assistance from the imagination, and without having recourse to its activity. When this disposition can be identified there can be no more doubt ; we have the most certain mark of the call to the contemplative way, and the soul should then abide in peace, and no longer be troubled about anything but giving itself up to God, yielding itself to His guidance, listening in the inner chambers of its heart with a loving attention to the Divine instructions.¹

It is very advisable to teach the soul to learn to delight in the repose of love as soon as it manifests itself,² and we must persuade it that its prayer has been excellent when it has maintained itself in God's presence without even having entertained any distinct thoughts or really ardent affections.³

¹ *Obscure Night*, i. 9 ; *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, ii. 12 ; *Living Flame*, st. iii., §§ 7, 8, etc.

² *Utile erit assuefieri paulatim ad persistendum in hoc amore contemplativo cum aliqua quiete et tranquillitate animi, quantum unicuique donatum fuerit desupe.* (Suarez, *De Oratione Mentale*, xi. 10).

³ For souls to whom this advice is applicable, Father Ludovic de Besse, *La Science de la Prière*, may be usefully recommended.

Some writers go as far as to advocate that even before the signs of the call to contemplation have made themselves apparent, and in order to prepare the soul thereto, we should teach it to make silent pauses in the course of its prayers. "It is important," says Fr. Rigoleuc, to keep silence at intervals during our prayer." Bossuet, quoted by Father de Caussade, who insists upon this point at great length, advises the interruption of the considerations at intervals by *pauses*, in order to give place to the prayer of the presence of God ; and Father Balthazar Alvarez, without being as definite on this point, seems to hold the same opinion.

This method seems to have St. Teresa's authority (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. iii. *et passim*). She does not approve of engaging in contemplation without a definite call from God. Amongst other dangers, she dreads presumption and a real loss of time. But it must be admitted that in her day and the surroundings in which she lived, contemplation and quietude were as common as they are now rare, and it was quite an ordinary thing, as appears from several passages of her works, to find souls who aspired to give themselves up to contemplation without having received any call from God. This is the abuse which the Saint is combating.

But these undesirable results noted by St. Teresa can be avoided, so it seems to us, by means of those pauses. The soul is tested by their means ; if it is found to be ripe for contemplation it will be gradually accustomed not to rest too much on its own activity, and to listen to God in silence. But let these pauses be short at the outset, and introduced without violence or effort. Finally, it is necessary that the director should avoid flattering his penitent's self-love, and lead the soul into the new paths without letting it think that it is ripe for a higher degree of prayer. "What need," he might say, "has God of your fine speeches and thoughts ? Remain before Him at times (to use the original simile of a saintly personage) like a little dog before its master, content

to gaze at Him and to be near Him ; or as the victim before its executioners, waiting until the flame takes hold of it and consumes it. Be a little child in God's presence. *Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli.* The little child does not trouble himself as to what he is to say to his mother, does not occupy himself as to the words that he is to use, the thoughts he is to express. He gazes at her, smiles at her, caresses her, or he simply rests his head upon her maternal breast, and in this abandonment there are marks of trustfulness and love which rejoice the mother's heart. So, if you love God, you will sometimes be conscious of His sweet presence. Yield yourself to it, then ; rest in His arms with no other desire than that of abiding there, no other care than that of loving Him."

The director may also quote the example of the publican. If he spoke one word only—*Deus propitius esto mihi peccatori*—it was doubtless that he stood annihilated, as it were, at the spectacle of his sinfulness and the holiness of the God Whom he had offended. And this simple prayer earned our Lord's commendation. By his prudence and discretion the director will avoid exposing these souls to presumption, and he will soon know whether they are called to the prayer of silence and contemplation.

339. When we find the soul actually experiencing the prayer of quietude at times, there will be no further room for doubt, and it will then be well to advise these pauses, to point out the utility (in the words of St. Jane Frances de Chantal) "of moderating the too great activity of the senses and listening to God." "Ah, how good it is," says the Saint, "to hear God speaking within us rather than to speak to Him ourselves ! One word from His mouth is worth more than ten thousand of the things that we could say to Him."

We need to be greatly encouraged before we can accept this silent repose, so natural is it to us to produce definite acts. "From our way of behaving when at prayer," says Father de Caussade, "it would often seem as though we

were convinced that all would be lost did we trust more to God than to ourselves. This is what our Saviour gave St. Catharine of Siena to understand. She relates it thus : “ Having one day said to Him, ‘ But, Lord, how is it that at the time of the prophets and Apostles Thou didst such great things, communicating Thyself so abundantly to mankind, and now we see nothing similar to it ? ’ ‘ My child,’ said Jesus Christ, ‘ it is because formerly men showed a great simplicity, a great mistrust of self, and a complete reliance in Me. But now they are so filled with self, so occupied with their own achievements, all that they are saying to Me and incessantly repeating, as though I forgot it, that they rarely leave Me time to work in them after My own desires, because they want to say everything and do everything in their own way ’ ” (*Spiritual Instructions on the Divers States of Prayer*, part ii., dialogue 6).

340. It would be to go too fast, however, were we to wish to withdraw from affective prayer those who have but just entered upon contemplation. Only in those moments when the repose of love makes itself perceived let there be silence ; nothing is better. But over and above all this we should follow the rules of affective prayer, and observe its divisions —the preparation, presence of God, consideration of some mystery or religious truth, the ardent colloquy with Jesus, and the resolution.

This is what St. John of the Cross expressly teaches (*Mount Carmel*, No. 15). It is what the Ven. Father Libermann wrote to a seminarist : “ In moments of dryness do not be satisfied with simple repose, and this is my reason. You have not yet attained to a sufficiently high degree of renunciation. If God had accustomed you for a long time to this prayer, and you had formed the habit of it, I should tell you to go on in faith ; but in this case you ought to wait ” (*Letter*, vol. iii., p. 353). The kind of affective prayer which would be the most efficacious here, should any other attraction not come in the way, is this prayer of recollection, the description of which we have borrowed from St.

Teresa (*supra*, No. 272). It will dispose the soul better than any other to receive the contemplative operations, and will contribute to its progress.

341. Let us conclude with the words of St. Francis of Sales, which confirm and sum up what we have said : " You desire to know whether a soul which is still very imperfect could remain profitably before God in that simple attention to His holy presence in prayer. And I reply that if God gives you the power, you can well so abide, for it often happens that our Lord vouchsafes these quietudes and tranquillities to souls which are not yet completely purged. But while they still stand in need of purification, they ought, besides this prayer, to make such observations and considerations as are necessary to their amendment for even when God maintains them in a state of entire recollection, they have sufficient freedom to be enabled to discourse with the understanding on various matters. Why, then, should they not make considerations and resolutions for their own improvement and the practice of the Christian virtues ?" (2nd Entretien, *De la Confiance*).

CHAPTER IV

THE DIRECTION OF FERVENT SOULS

§ 1. *The Practice of Recollection, Humility, and the Other Virtues.*

342. THE fact that these souls must maintain themselves in recollection and prayer is obvious, " since they are like to the little child which is still nourished by its mother's milk " (St. Teresa, *Fourth Mansion*, chap. iii.). They should not neglect the precautions which their weakness necessitates. Otherwise dissipation of mind would soon lead to

immortification and ease ; they would lose their fervour instead of advancing towards perfection.

We can say the same with regard to humility, the practice of which becomes more and more necessary for them, and those other virtues also of which we have spoken in the preceding book. What we say of pious souls is applicable also to the fervent, and the method that we would suggest for training them in the exercise of these virtues is usually also adopted for the souls of which we are speaking.¹

343. Some souls, in spite of their sincere desire for progress, are lacking in courage or perseverance ; they need to be stimulated and upheld. Others have an ardent imagination rather than a solid will. They are enthusiastic, over-excited ; they will voluntarily demand a life of suffering ; they will dream of heroic sacrifices, while they still need to make a real progress in everyday virtues. Seeing themselves as victims accepted by God for the salvation of souls, they do nothing but make lamentation ; they take the least trials (or even troubles and persecutions, which only exist in their own imagination, or which they have magnified out of all recognition) for formidable ordeals ; they do not realize all the annoyance that they cause to their neighbour by their complaints, their melancholy airs, and their gloomy and sometimes sullen demeanour. They believe themselves to be in a high state of advancement because they have a theoretical acquaintance with the highest doctrines, and have felt themselves glow with admiration and enthusiasm for everything sublime and heroic. But as they have been content to fill their minds with beautiful ideas and their hearts with sterile desires, without devoting themselves solidly to the practice of virtue, the light upon which they so pride themselves will be to them rather a cause for punishment than for reward.

¹ The *Manuel des âmes intérieures* (Father Grou) cannot be too highly recommended for fervent souls. This little volume will teach them, better, perhaps, than any other, how to respond to God's designs upon them (Paris : Lecoffre, 1 fr.).

However little the fervent soul may fall into this error, the danger should be pointed out to it, and it should be made to see how a defective humility has already arrested its progress, and will soon destroy it completely, unless it regains its dispositions of fervour.

344. The desire for suffering is certainly very praiseworthy, *provided that a real humility goes with it*. Truly pious souls, understanding the value of the Cross, sincerely desire not to pass a day without suffering something for God. They thank Him for each trial that befalls them; they consecrate themselves to a life of sacrifices, always supplementing those sent them by Providence by others which are voluntary. They accept in advance, and offer up for the Church and for souls, all that it shall please God to send them. But they never lose sight of their own sinfulness. While resigning themselves to bear all future trials, they know that God measures His chastisements according to the strength of His children, and they only desire such sufferings as are proportionate to their weakness, and do not ask Him to treat them as though they were strong and heroic souls. Neither do they magnify their troubles, or spend their time seeking support and consolation from creatures. Their thoughts are more occupied with the sufferings of Jesus than with their own, and they say to themselves that all that they bear for Him is as nothing compared to His sufferings for their sakes.

§ 2. *Need for Perfect Renunciation.*

345. *Pauci inveniuntur contemplativi* (says the author of the *Imitation*), *quia pauci sciunt se a perituriis creaturis ad plenum sequestrare*. We find few contemplative souls, because few know how to separate themselves entirely from creatures and from perishable things (Book III., chap. xxxi.). “The great obstacle to contemplation,” we read in the same chapter, “is that we stop at what is sensible and external, and do not mortify ourselves truly: *Magnum*

impedimentum quia . . . parum de perfecta mortificatione habetur. And this perfect detachment is one of the principles upon which the writer of this admirable book most constantly insists ; and not this holy writer only, but all the ascetic masters declare that there is but one way of leading a soul to contemplation, and this is to make it practise true mortification.

346. Let us hear St. John of the Cross on this point. He explains in an admirable way how necessary is this *universal renunciation* of all things, and in what it consists.

“ The state of Divine union consists in the total transformation of the will into the will of God, in such a way that every movement of the will shall be always the movement of the will of God only. This is the reason why, in this state, two wills are said to be one—my will and God’s will—so that the will of God is also that of the soul. But if the soul then cleaves to any imperfection contrary to the will of God, His will is not done, for the soul wills that which God wills not. It is clear, therefore, that if the soul is to be united in love and will with God, *every desire of the will must first of all be cast aside, however slight it may be*—that is, we must not *deliberately and knowingly assent* with the will to any imperfection, and we must have such power over it and such liberty as to reject every such desire the moment we are aware of it. I say knowingly, for without deliberation and a clear perception of what we are doing, or because it is not wholly in our power, we may easily give way to imperfections and venial sins, and to those natural desires of which I have just spoken. It is of such sins as these, not so entirely voluntary, that it is written, ‘ A just man shall fall seven times, and shall rise again.’ ”

“ But as to those voluntary and perfectly *deliberate* desires, how slight soever their objects may be, any one of them not overcome is sufficient to prevent this union. I am speaking of the unmortified habit thereof, because certain acts occasionally have not so much power, for the habit of them is not settled ; still, we must get rid of them, for they, too,

proceed from habitual imperfection. Some habits of voluntary imperfections, so far as they are never perfectly overcome, hinder not only the Divine union, but our progress towards perfection.

"These habitual imperfections are, for instance, much talking, certain attachments, which we never resolve to break through, such as to individuals, to a book or a cell, to a particular food, to certain society, the satisfaction of one's taste, science, news, and such things.¹ Every one of these imperfections, if the soul is attached and habituated to them, results in serious injuries to our growth and progress in goodness. Yea, even if we fall daily into many other imperfections greater than these, provided they are not the result of the habitual indulgence of any evil inclination, we should not be so much hindered in our course as we are by this selfish attachment of the soul to particular objects ; for while the soul entertains it it is useless to hope that we can ever attain to perfection, even though the object of our attachment be but of the slightest importance possible.

"Does it make any difference whether a bird be held by a slender thread or by a rope, while the bird is bound and cannot fly till the cord that holds it is broken ? It is true that a slender thread is more easily broken ; still, notwithstanding, if it is not broken, the bird cannot fly. This is the state of a soul with particular attachments ; it never can attain to the liberty of the Divine union, whatever virtues it may possess" (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book I., chap. xi.).

347. Of course, this universal abnegation is not necessary to enable God to grant the favour of some contemplative prayer from time to time. St. Francis of Sales, as we saw in the last chapter, says this expressly. In another passage which we have also quoted (*Love of God*, Book X., chap. iv.), speaking of these souls who "truly love over-

¹ St. Francis of Sales says that the simple attachment to an idle thought hinders the soul from reaching perfection.

ardently and with superfluity, but do not love superfluities, but only such things as they should love," he adds: "And therefore *are they admitted to the nuptial couch of the Heavenly Solomon* (that is to say, those unions, states of recollection and repose of love, of which he has spoken in Books V. and VI.) ; but not in the capacity of true brides, because the superfluity with which they have loved lawful things *has hindered them from entering very often into these Divine unions with the Bridegroom*, being occupied and distracted by loving, apart from Him and without Him, that which they should have loved only in Him and for Him."

When the soul has renounced itself completely it will be in the real unitive life, and contemplation will have become much more habitual. Raised to the rank of a spouse of the Divine Master, it will receive the marks of His love much more frequently. Perfect self-renunciation, then, is the goal at which we must aim, and there are two things which will lead us thither : (1) The soul's own labour ; (2) the Divine purification, which consists in the aridities and trials sent to it by Providence.

§ 3. The Soul's Labour after Renunciation.

348. This is what St. John of the Cross calls the *active night of the soul's faculties*.

This labour consists in "incessantly examining into the four chief passions of the human heart, taking note of their tendency and object, and making it our continual study to transform them into God" (Surin, *Love of God*, Book I., chap. vii.). And these four chief passions, which, according to St. John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book I., chap. xiii.), we are to mortify ceaselessly, are joy, hope, fear, and grief. Now, these four passions of the soul, these motions of the human heart, are caused either by the present good which we possess, which is joy ; or by the absent good to which we aspire, which is desire or hope ; or by the present

evil, which engenders grief ; or by the absent evil which we dread, and this is fear. Now, we must establish ourselves in the disposition to renounce all good things but those which are supernatural, and to accept all evils which do not harm the soul.

We must study, then, (1) not to seek for joy, or any voluntary deliberate happiness, apart from God. (2) Not to attach ourselves to any hope, any desire, for a purely sensible or natural good. "Immediately that a soul, given up to God's good pleasure, perceives in itself any desire," says St. Francis of Sales, "it incontinently causes it to die within the will of God" (*Entretien de la Confiance*). (3) To drive far away all fear which is not inspired by some considerations of faith. (4) And, finally, never to allow oneself to fall into sorrow and grief for any reasons other than those where God's glory or supernatural interests are concerned.

So that when a soul appears to be advanced in the illuminative life, full of love for Jesus suffering, or of zeal for God's glory, and already devoted to the practice of mortification, we should suggest this perfect renunciation ; it will be the surest means to its rapid progress.¹

§ 4. *Passive Renunciation—The Divine Purgation.*

349. However much the soul may labour to attain to this perfect abnegation, it cannot succeed by its sole efforts. "However much the beginner strives," St. John of the Cross says, "to mortify his inclinations, he cannot wholly or even partly markedly succeed if God does not also participate, by way of the purification of the obscure night (*Obscure Night*, i. 7).

¹ In order to bring this doctrine within the reach of fervent souls we have collected all the passages from the holy writers demonstrating this necessity of perfect renunciation, and have explained how, according to St. John of the Cross, it should be practised. (*Le secret de l'amour divin, ou le parfait renoncement.*)

In order to lead the soul to purify itself more completely, and to strip itself of all its natural affections, God will permit it to pass through troubles, temptations, aridities, and trials of every kind. Its method of conduct can be summed up in two words, a loving submission to the will of God, and an absolute fidelity in His service.

350. First, *it is most important that souls should not regard this purifying state as evil.* They often torment and distress themselves, and think that it is a punishment from God, especially when they are a prey to temptations and dryness. In this case they fall into sadness and fear, and thence to discouragement is but a step.

"St. Peter, says Holy Scripture, seeing the storm, which was very great, was afraid, and as soon as he was afraid he began to sink and to drown. Then he cried, 'Lord, save me,' and our Lord took him by the hand and said: 'O man of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? See the holy Apostle walking dryshod upon the waters; the waves and the wind could not cause him to sink, but the fear of them will prove fatal to him unless his Master saves him. Fear is a greater evil than the evil itself'" (St. Francis of Sales to St. Jane Frances, August 6, 1606).

351. We must advise these souls, then, not to be afraid, but to trust themselves wholly in God's hands, without asking by what way He is leading them and why He is trying them.

"Remember two things—(1) that the children of Israel were for forty years in the desert before coming to the promised land, and yet six weeks would have sufficed to make the journey easily. But it was not lawful for them to inquire why God made them wander round about and brought them by such difficult ways; and all those who murmured died before their arrival. The other (2) is that Moses, the greatest friend of God amongst them all, died on the threshold of the promised land, seeing it with his eyes, but not being able to possess it.

It pleases God that we should pay small heed to the

way by which we have to travel, and that our eyes should be fixed on Him who leads us and on the blessed country to which He is bringing us. What should it matter to us whether our way is by the deserts or by the fields, so long as God is with us, and that we are on our way to Paradise?" (St. Francis of Sales to St. Jane Frances, February 18, 1605).

"How unjust we are, and without common sense, my dear sir," wrote Father Libermann. "A blind man trusts himself to a little dog, which leads him where it will, and the man follows without knowing where he is going; and we, wretched creatures that we are, blinder than those that are born blind, we have so great a Guide, so far-seeing and so full of tenderness for us, and we will not trust Him with our souls" (*Letter of June 30, 1838*).

352. As self-love usually plays a large part in these anxieties (see *supra*, No. 241), and as, besides, God desires the extirpation of this fault, the director will advise the soul in its trials to forget itself and to think more of Jesus. "O God" (it should say constantly in its prayers), "find hearts that can love Thee; it will console me in my incapacity if others pay Thee that love which is Thy due. Yes, O my God, what I desire above all is that Thy Name should be glorified, that Thou shouldst reign over all hearts, and that Thy will should be accomplished in all things and always."

353. In order to encourage these souls it is well to remind them that God's designs in these ordeals are good and merciful, and to get them to regard them, not as a chastisement, but rather as a favour, failing which state of desolation, privation, and denudation, they would never attain to true sanctity. It was thus that St. Francis of Sales dealt with St. Jane Frances when she first came under his direction (June 24, 1604), warning her of the trials that she was about to undergo. "You will have contradictions and sorrows. The throes and pains of the spiritual child-birth are no less than those of the physical. You have

made trial of the one and of the other. Many a time have I been helped in my little difficulties by the words which our dear Saviour spoke : ‘ A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour is come, but when she has brought forth the child she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world ’ (John xvi. 21). I think they will console you also if you reflect on them and often repeat them. Our souls should desire to bring forth, not *out of* themselves, but *in* themselves, a male child — the most sweet, gracious, and beautiful that could be desired. It is Jesus Whom we must endeavour thus to bring forth and produce within ourselves. . . . We must suffer anguish in order to bring Him forth, and to be the mother of such a child is worth much suffering.” The holy bishop’s prophecy was fulfilled. After the first sensible fervour came various distresses of mind, difficulties, and temptations¹, which strengthened his penitent and brought her into a more settled state of piety, into a fervour which was wholly spiritual. And the Saint described himself as being quite easy about her. “ No, before God, my dear daughter, I will be in no wise troubled. I fear nothing as to your incapacities or the pains that you suffer in your mind. The pains of childbirth have passed ; what can I fear for you at this time of the day ? ” (*Letter of June 29, 1606*).

Oh, how great a service should we render to these persons if we could inspire them with an invincible trust ! It is this that God requires of them. The graces which He has showered upon them with such liberality give Him the right to exact this absolute reliance. He pleases to put their faith to the test, reserving for them, if they are faithful, yet greater blessings in the future than any that they have as yet received. Let them continue unshakable in the severest trials, let them say to God, like holy Job, “ Although Thou shouldest slay me, yet will I trust in Thee ” — *Etiam si occideret me, in ipso sperabo* (Job. xiii. 15). When their

¹ See the *Letters* of August 30, 1605, March 7 and 16, 1606.

hearts are expanded with this boundless faith they will not walk, they will fly, on the path of perfection. *Viam mandatorum tuorum cucurri, cum dilatasti cor meum* (Ps. cxviii.).

354. With regard to trials which come to us from without, our action must be the same as in the case of such as are interior—resign ourselves, that is to say, and submit ourselves to God's will. “Be in the Master's hands like the anvil before the blacksmith, or, rather, like the hot iron that he holds in his pincers. He strikes many a mighty blow upon it, and the iron takes all the shapes that he desires. You are still like unto a piece of iron, unwrought, rugged, hard, unpliant, and our Lord must make you contrite and supple by contradictions and crosses (Libermann, *Letters of August 21, 1842*).

This comparison puts us in mind of that which B. Suzo employs. “We read in the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert* that a disciple inquired of his master what he should do in order to become perfect; and the master replied: ‘Go into the cemetery and offer compliments and praises to the dead and to their ashes, and then afterwards curse and insult them; and you will see whether the dead answer you, and if their ashes are troubled.’ The disciple obeyed, and returned to tell his master that the dead had answered never a word, and that their ashes had been disturbed no more by his praises than by his insults. The master replied: ‘This is perfection: go thou and do likewise’” (*Spiritual Writings*).

Fervent souls understand this language, and the ardour of their love makes this complete abnegation easier to them. We should even lead them further still, suggesting to them that they should rejoice and bless God in the midst of their sufferings. Never fail, we should say, when you suffer some humiliation, or when some trial overtakes you, to exclaim instantly from the bottom of your heart, “My God, I thank Thee.” If the trial is a severe one, recite a *Laudate* or *Magnificat* fervently, or even, in special circumstances a *Te Deum*; for, as the

Cross is a blessing, should we not measure our gratitude in proportion to the greatness of the benefit received? You do not know what the angels envy us for—certainly for no other thing than this, that we can suffer for our Lord, while they have never suffered anything for Him (St. Francis of Sales to the Abbess of Puits d'Orbe, September, 1604). This is the language of love. Whoso loves God truly is glad to suffer for Him.

355. The sufferings which God sends to His children are always proportioned to their strength. Unhappily, many persons aggravate the burden: they think of it constantly, they keep continually in mind the injuries done to them, the injustices of which they are the victims, the privations which they have to impose on themselves, the rebuffs that they have received, the hindrances to their activity, thus increasing their troubles and making themselves unable to bear them. It is quite the contrary with prudent souls. If they rejoice to suffer for God, they do not stay to dwell on the cause of their afflictions.

“It seems to me,” wrote the Venerable Mary of the Incarnation, “that it is absolutely necessary to cut short all reflections upon things which might cause us pain, all the more because, unless we take heed, when once the imagination is affected, the mind also becomes troubled, and then there is an end to peace and tranquillity. To tell you the truth, during the thirty years since God gave me the grace of an attraction to a more interior life, I have found no other means so favourable to real progress as this general curtailment of all dwelling upon the difficulties that we encounter, especially such as do not tend to God or to the practice of the virtues” (*Letter to her Son*, October 22, 1649).

356. But with these loving hearts, their most severe trials come usually from their temptations. The fear of displeasing God causes them real agony and sorrow. They must be consoled, therefore, and, as we have said, taught to despise the enemy’s attacks.

"St. Francis of Sales," wrote Mme. de la Maisonfort to Bossuet, "says that it is not in arguing with temptations that we escape them best." And Bossuet replied : "This expression of not arguing with temptation is as correct as it is fine. As a rule, we need simply take it as vanquished, without even wrestling with it, turning at once to God, as if our minds were made up and there was nothing to hesitate about."

"Even when it is a question of the most impious, disgusting, and horrible temptations against God," says the Blessed Albert the Great, "do not even heed them. Pay no attention and despise them. Do not burden your conscience with the recollection of them. The enemy will not fail to take to flight if you thus despise both him and his vain phantoms, for his pride is gigantic, and he cannot bear to be despised and disdained. And it is very certain that the sovereign remedy against these temptations is that of not paying the least attention to them, no more than to the flies which come against our will and flit before our eyes" (*De l'Intime Union avec Dieu*, chap. xi. ; trans. P. Rousset).

The hour of prayer is often chosen by the enemy for his assaults, but, even so, we should deal with him only by contempt.

This also is St. Peter of Alcantara's advice : "As for the importunate thoughts which usually pursue us in our prayer, there is nothing for it but to combat them with great courage and constancy, provided that we do it without great stress and intensity of thought; for this is not *a contest of strength, but the work of grace and humility*. This is why we should turn to God without scruples or uneasiness the moment that we find ourselves in this state, *provided always that it is not our own fault, or only very slightly so*, and say with all humility and devotion : 'Lord, Thou knowest what I am, what canst Thou gather upon ground which Thou hast cursed with briars and thorns? Such are the fruits which it must bring forth unless Thou removest

Thy ban.' Then take up the thread of the subject and patiently await the coming of the Lord, Who never rejects the humble. If disquieting thoughts return, and you resist them patiently with all your might, be sure that you will make more progress by this resistance than you would do in enjoying all God's sweetness " (St. Peter of Alcantara, *Treatise on Mental Prayer*, part ii., chap. iv. 2).

357. We have followed the Christian soul step by step from its introduction into the spiritual life up to the threshold of the unitive life. The progress is not uniform in all cases. God, Who is lavish with His gifts, distributes them in varying measures. Obstacles which He thinks it inexpedient to remove impede the course of His merciful designs at times, while on the soul's side the co-operation may be more or less generous.

Fidelity to grace, this should be the chief subject of our examinations and reflections. The part assigned to the creature in the work of its own sanctification is so great that it need only blame itself if it should remain in a state of mediocrity. Who can set bounds to the generosity of God were we always to respond to His advances ? Should I have received less grace than that saintly soul whose virtues astound and delight me, if I had not abused the aids which God had offered me ?

" Everything," says St. Paul, " profits those that love God " (*Diligentibus Deum omnia co-operantur in bonum*). And St. Augustine does not fear to add, *etiam peccata*. Yes, even the faults into which they fall are an occasion for the multiplication of their acts of humility, of contrition, and of love. The assaults of the demons make their prayers more ardent, their faith more meritorious, their efforts more sanctifying. Troubles and trials effect their detachment from the creature, and unite them the more closely to God, while the lights which He vouchsafes to them increase their charity.

The soul fails too often with regard to grace, but grace

never fails the soul. We shall perceive this clearly on the day when all God's goodness with regard to us, and all our own infidelities, will be disclosed to us. We shall realize how the words of the Holy Spirit have been verified to the letter in our own case. *Hæc est voluntas Dei sanctificatio vestra* (This is the will of God, even your sanctification).

A P P E N D I X

EXCELSIUS

358. You, dear reader, who have followed me faithfully up to now, will you part company with me here? There are some, we are told, who are content to study the inferior degrees of the spiritual life, and who, while casting admiring glances upon the souls that are scaling the heights of virtue, decline to follow them. The teaching that we are about to deliver seems too high to them, the virtues that we are about to describe above their capacity; they do not think themselves called to live upon the heights, they do not aspire to perfection.

Oh, did you but understand how God desires this for you, this perfection which so terrifies you, you would be less pusillanimous, your courage would mount up, and you would set about learning the way to attain to it with a holy ardour.

God hungers for your love. Love is His food, love is His life. He has created intelligent beings only in order that He might reap in them a rich harvest of love. This infinite God deigns, as it were, to stoop to gather in our love. "My child, give Me thy heart," He says to us—*Præbe, fili, cor tuum mihi* (Prov. xxiii. 26). The better to win us, He Himself speaks to us of His unchangeable love. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? and if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Isa. xl ix. 15). He strictly commands us to love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with

all our minds, and with all our strength. And what proof of His love has He not given to us ? " God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son " (John iii. 16). And has not the Divine Son Himself carried love to its very furthest limits ? *In finem dilexit eos.*

Now, perfection is love in its normal development, it is love truly worthy of the name. Does it seem too high a thing to you ? Jesus does not so consider it, for He has said, *Perfecte estate* (Be ye perfect). He does not find it too high for the souls whom He nourishes with His flesh and with His blood. What can He think when He sees you approach the holy table, content with your mediocrity, resigned never to love Him here below with a perfect affection ? And if the gift of the Holy Eucharist does not excite your generosity, if it is not sufficient to cause you to aspire to the higher degrees of virtue, turn your eyes to Calvary, and you will understand that it was not to enable you to remain in your imperfections that Jesus suffered as He did.

359. Pusillanimous reader, let me speak to you of the sufferings of Jesus, and then tell me whether you still persist in being content with merely ordinary virtue, whether you do not blush to requite our sweetest Saviour's love with such a poor reward.

When you cannot get free of any suffering, you strive at least to diminish it. Jesus, Who could have prayed to His Heavenly Father, and obtained from Him whole legions of angels ; Jesus, Who by one single word overthrew His enemies in the Garden of Olives, not only did He not refuse suffering, but He even, as it were, set Himself to undergo it in all its aggravations. He opened wide the gates of His Heart in order that this suffering might enter in, in its full plenitude, and that the work of His expiation might be freely accomplished. His human soul had been created with a higher intelligence than that of all other souls and all angelic spirits. He brought all the powers of His intellectual vision to bear upon the consideration

of the sins of men, in the present, past, and future, fathoming all their malice !

You Christians, who so frequently banish the humiliating remembrance of your faults, think how Jesus did not turn His eyes away from them at Gethsemane.

His Heart possessed a greater power of affection than that of any human creature. Jesus called all His love into action, or, rather, He gave Himself up to all the ardours of His tenderness, both for His Heavenly Father and for mankind, His brethren ; then, as He contemplated all those offences committed against His Father, together with the myriad ills which souls have suffered because of sin, He caused a limitless sorrow to be born within His Heart. The suffering that He endured, seeing His Father unknown, outraged by so many creatures who owe everything to Him, will never be comprehended by any mortal soul. As to the ills caused by sin, the temporal pains, the loss of grace (sufferings alas ! in many cases eternal), and as each one of the members of the human family was intensely dear to Him, the Heart of Jesus endured as many tortures as He had already encountered, or that He would henceforth encounter, from all the sinners upon the earth in the course of the ages to come. To turn to this comparison which Jesus Himself made to the Blessed Vavani : suppose, dear reader, that you had a thousand feet, a thousand hands, and so on with every organ of your body, and that they were all simultaneously tortured by torments as atrocious as they were varied, would the agony not seem intolerable to you ? Well, then ! Jesus said to the Blessed Vavani, " I am the Head of a body of which all Christians are the members, the greater number of whom have been, are, and will be, torn from Me by mortal sin." And how many amongst them torn from Him for ever !

360. And amidst all these griefs our dear Lord has no comforter. He is alone, abandoned by all. He has not allowed His Blessed Mother to follow Him to Gethsemane.

He turned to His chosen disciples, but they were sleeping ; they could not watch with Him even for one hour. And some hours later His desolation will be still more complete ; when His Apostles shall have fled, when Peter shall have denied Him, when, towards the close of that awful night, the servants, weary of blaspheming, insulting, and smiting Him, shall leave Him alone for a while until the return of Caiphas from the Sanhedrin, He will be alone, without a friend, without any succour ; those who, four days ago, shouted their Hosannas are no longer there to console Him, and He knows that they will soon be drawing nigh again, but only to cry, “Crucify Him !”

To be abandoned of men would be as nothing if He were conscious of God’s nearness. But this supreme desolation, the consciousness of being forsaken by God, this also He will endure, and He will endure it up to His last breath, for it is at the moment of His death that He utters that piercing cry : “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? ” Agony of soul, agony of body, nothing was lacking. His body is one vast wound. That which the prophet has spoken of the moral condition of the people of God : *A planta pedis usque ad verticem non est in eo sanitas* (From the sole of the foot unto the crown of the head there is in Him no place without its wound), is literally true of the Victim Who has taken upon Himself the sins of the people. All the runagates from hell glut their fury upon Him. At the column, blows succeeded blows, and the executioners were weary of smiting before Jesus was weary of suffering. Then they press down upon His head that horrible crown of thorns, of which one cannot think without a shudder.

361. This is the treatment meted out to the Son of God —He Whose majesty fills the heavens with wonder, He Whose power called the universe into being out of nothingness, the Eternal, the Boundless Wisdom, the Infinite Love.

Ah ! yes, Love ! If His other attributes are veiled during

His Passion, this one shines forth before all eyes. His love ! Jesus proves it by His patience. He proves it by allowing His executioners to live, praying to His Father to pardon them, touching the heart of the thief. He enfolds all men in His love. Does He not suffer Himself to be embraced by Judas ? does He not call him His friend ? He would hide under His goodness the ingratitude of the traitor, He would submerge under the ocean of His love, of His merits, of His expiation, the sins of the vilest criminals. Such as do not obstinately resist Him He will purify by His tears and by His blood ; He will transform them by His grace, and in the endless ages they shall be with Him, flooded with glory, with sanctity, and with bliss.

These are the thoughts which uphold our most sweet Saviour. And do you think, dear reader, that at that moment, as He gazed upon your soul, He did not desire a greater perfection for it here below, and on high a resplendent, overwhelming glory, an immense happiness for ever and ever ?

No ; if you do not attain to a high degree of virtue—you, whom He has already called to a life of piety ; you, who know His love so well, who understand how intoxicating are the joys of heaven for courageous hearts ; if you lie prone upon the earth, the fault is yours alone. I do not address you as being of the number of those souls whom He has chosen as His spouses, still less of the number of those whom He has made His ministers upon the earth ; for if, honoured by such dignities as these, you did not aspire to perfection, you would indeed be without excuse.

362. Why, then, do you hold back ? Do the sacrifices which perfection requires seem too hard to you ? Well, then, *draw near often unto Jesus Crucified* ; from Him you will derive an inexhaustible courage. He who is constant at Calvary will find his generosity grow ever more and more at the foot of the Cross ; no obstacle will be able to hold him back. Maybe you love your comfort over-well,

or you cannot make up your mind to give up those little cherishings of your sinful flesh ? Seeing what Jesus has done to His body, you will triumph over your sensuality, and will no longer shrink from penance. You cannot accept humiliations, reproaches, contempt, oblivion, hard words, mockeries, calumnies ? You crave to be esteemed, loved, praised, honoured, consulted, approved ? Behold Jesus suffering ! Is He esteemed, sought after, approved, honoured ? Judas, the executioners, the people, the learned, the rich, the priesthood, Herod—all are despising Him, insulting Him, blaspheming Him. You cannot overcome your antipathies, forgive this person who has made you suffer, done you some injury ? Oh, follow Jesus to Gethsemane, to the Pretorium, to Golgotha, and remember that the thought of this same person, *whose wrong-doing wounded Him also more than it has wounded you*, never left Him, and that our Lord was happy to suffer for his sake.

Become, then, dear reader, a frequenter of Calvary, and you will soon burn with the desire to pay back love for love to the Heart of Jesus. Far from dreading the heights of perfection, you will soon aspire thereto with all the ardour of your soul, and Jesus will bless your efforts. One more perfect soul ! One more heart aflame with the Divine love ! Great will be the glory for God, great the joy for the Heart of Jesus ; for the Church a power and a support, and for yourself the most desirable of all blessings !

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